

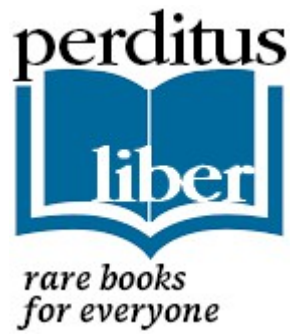
RALPH KEENE

THE LAST DEVIL



by

SIGNE
TOKSVIG.



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the



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book:

The Last Devil

by

Signe Toksvig

Published 1927

THE LAST DEVIL

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BY

SIGNE TOKSVIG



NEW YORK

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SIGNE TOKSVIG was born and brought up in Nyköburg, a small Danish town on the island of Sjaelland. As her father and mother were both writers, it was perhaps natural that she should decide, at a very early age, to become a writer herself. She also wanted to be a traveler and cross the desert of Arabia. Instead, the Toksvigs crossed the Atlantic. After learning English, Miss Toksvig entered Cornell University, from which she was graduated in 1916. She spent several months on the staff of *Vogue*, then went to *The New Republic*, where she remained until 1922.

While Miss Toksvig was with *The New Republic* she married one of the editors, Francis Hackett; but, being a charter member of the Lucy Stone League, she uses her own name.

In 1922 Miss Toksvig and Mr. Hackett left for Europe, where they traveled for four years, spending much of that time in the Basque country. They are now living in Ireland, which, Miss Toksvig says, is as good as the Basque country for research in witchcraft.

Although Miss Toksvig has contributed numerous articles and short stories to the leading magazines, *THE LAST DEVIL* is the first novel she has written.

CHAPTER ONE

IT was a rainy October day on the Basque coast, and Biarritz sat disconsolately among her yellowing tamarisks. The sea roared with just anger at the rustic fences made of cement and at the large flat faces of the gray hotels. All the summer visitors had not yet gone and a few of the winter ones had come, but the straight downpour kept them in their rooms. At the Hotel *Moderne et d'Albion* the guests, instead of taking their after-luncheon coffee under the garden sycamore, were dawdling into a small glass-enclosed veranda from the end of which there was what had been advertised as a magnificent sea-view. And it is true that one rock and one wave were visible, one black battered rock and one wild frothing wave, forever climbing. With this, and the low rates, and the glitter of Biarritz, Lady Densham had been lured away from the rain in England to the rain on the Basque coast, involving herself in the additional expense of bringing over her secretary-companion, Miss Christine Tancrede.

Christine being young and determined had nimbly preceded the other guests and hid herself behind the dusty palm at the end of the veranda that had the view. She liked the furious wave, the uncompromising rock, in fact they were her only companions. Not that she pitied herself; she was quite used to being alone. There are more castaways in crowds than on desert islands and

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more people marooned by circumstance than by ship-wreck. Christine had been marooned most of her life on a desert island in Chicago. The million roaring waves of the city had surrounded but not reached her. She and her fellow castaway, Mademoiselle Jeanne Daru, had lived high and solitary on the top floor of a lodging-house, where the ship-wreck of her father's fortunes had left them. Christine's mother had died when she was too young to remember her, and the governess, Mademoiselle Jeanne, had brought the long-sleeved, pig-tailed, solemn little girl to join her father in America. Exactly why he had left England, and what he did in Chicago, Christine never knew. He was nearly always traveling, and on his rare visits he limited his parental responsibility to arguing with Mademoiselle about the money due for their support. He had died when the child was about

twelve; yet she had no impression of him except as a slack-faced, querulous man, whose one emotional gesture had been to pat her vaguely on the head and remind her that she came of a good old English family.

But with this remark, and with Mademoiselle's cryptic addition that the family was perhaps even better than Mr. Tancrede knew, Christine created for herself a set of noble relatives, high-nosed, hard, brilliant, inhabiting a tapestried England, fiercely bad and fiercely good. Definite people, not like the bleak soggy creatures whom she half timidly, half haughtily avoided in Mrs. McPherson's lodging-house. How she had

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dreaded being swallowed up in their gray world when Mademoiselle's death had left her entirely alone. How deeply relieved she had been when the letter came from Lady Densham, announcing herself as Christine's sole surviving relative, who, in response to an appeal from Jeanne Daru, would be willing to accept Miss Tancrede as her companion.

The girl flattened her nose against the window pane and tried bitterly to concentrate on the view. Her noble relative was approaching.

Lady Densham had indeed entered and had sat down near by in a creaky bamboo chair. She was knitting. She was cross. One could hear by the petulant click of her needles that she was brooding on her discomforts. It wasn't only the weather. The cooking at these foreign hotels was too rich, they put in too much butter; the tea was too weak, and the coffee—she couldn't drink the bitter stuff. Full of chicory. She sighed; she absent-mindedly pushed part of her ample bosom back into the corset. Corsets were a nuisance, but otherwise how could you keep up your stockings if you had varicose veins and round garters didn't suit them? Lady Densham had the perfect ease of aristocracy even if she hadn't the means properly to sustain it. Sir William had died leaving her with little more than his historic collection of golf-clubs and the cottage near Birmingham. Indeed, if it weren't for that, as she often told Miss Tancrede, she would hardly be staying in a hotel like this. The same meal every day—

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potato soup, fish, veal, salad and a banana! Miss Tancrede ought really not to have encouraged her to make this trip to Biarritz. She sighed again and repeated her favorite gesture.

Christine heard the sigh and felt a little guilty. After all, in her plump, powdered, fussy way, Lady Densham was perhaps fretful rather than mean. And it was true that she, Christine, had put the whole weight of her wishing and willing into this trip, had furthered it in a thousand subtle, quiet ways. Never directly, she had learned her place too well for that. The first understanding of the new life had been that there was to be no reference to the relationship. Lady Densham was taking no chances with a niece by marriage who had been brought up in Chicago. She marked the gulf between them in cool and drawling intonations. And yet the girl minded that less than life itself in Hurley Cottage. It had been even bleaker than the mouse-like existence led by her and Mademoiselle on the top floor of Mrs. McPherson's. After all, Mademoiselle had taught her French and *petit point*, and by going to the library near by she had taught herself a great many more things. In that library French and English classics moldered in perfect obscurity—except for Christine. They were her only companions while the hard-working, taciturn Jeanne Daru was away earning their meager living by teaching in a convent school.

In Lady Densham's cottage there had been only the books sent by Mudie's. And tea-parties.

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And once in a while the flash of the word "Biarritz." "If it keeps on raining we might go to Biarritz."

For the girl this word had associations unconnected with fashion journals. In the delirium of her last illness, Mademoiselle Jeanne had repeated and repeated the word "Arraldia," and immediately after, "No, Mrs. Tancrede, I shall never tell Christine." And then she would say strange mad things about the Devil.

"Arraldia"—Christine had found that in a geographic dictionary; it was a small village in the Basque country, not too great a distance from Biarritz.

About her mother she knew little except that she had been Scotch and rigidly pious. Oblique questioning of Lady Densham only got her the information that her mother's family had greatly disappointed her father's family by not being as prosperous as represented, "although," as Lady Densham sourly remarked, "they ought to have been well off being so utterly godless, except for your mother."

Beyond this nothing was obtainable, except vague hints about morbid Scotch ancestors and devil-worship and the kind of family which had had

several witches burnt in the old days. All this bored Christine, as did all Lady Densham's attempts to drag in what she loved to call the "occult."

Well, here they were then, in Biarritz, and what good did it do her? In this hotel, and

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chained to Lady Densham, they were no nearer to Arraldia, simply in Hurley Cottage transplanted. She could hear the asthmatic breathing of the old general, the one who usually talked to them after meals. Hastily she pressed her face against the pane, gathered up her inmost being and concentrated it on whether the distant wave would be able to leap the height of the rock.

It came rushing up, butted the black glistening mass with white curving horns, was flung back, rose then, and leaped in mounting spume. Now, now would it? She told herself that if it did, something definitely strange would happen to her, something like nothing that had ever happened, before, something to freeze the marrow in her bones and turn her yellow hair white in a single night. She threw her whole eager soul into the climbing wave, she called on all her tense, tough will to help it, she was really one with it, one wild, leaping energy, outside the stuffy veranda, away from the flaccid chatter, the stagnant life.

But even under that determination slid the general's high brittle voice and Lady Densham's long drawl:

"I do think it was a fly orchis, General."

"But really, Lady Densham, I am certain it was a spider orchis, don't you know, just like a little spider, sitting there?"

Christine had to let the wave go in its very moment of triumph and resign herself to listening.

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The neat little general, so old he seemed to hold together by pure force of discipline, went from orchis to cowslips. He had once found some on the golf links. And he held out the hope of primroses to people who would stay till February.

Lady Densham's knitting needles were now purring mildly along, accompanied by appreciative murmurs. When the general left, confessing he was going to take his forty winks, an Honorable Miss took his place. She was rather a hard-mouthed spinster, anxious to be shown a new stitch that

Lady Densham knew. When she had begun her strangely unsuitable cerise jumper she entertained her teacher with stories of birds. Finches she had seen in Biarritz. Dear little English birds. And she had been on a mountain where she had seen soaring above her a “gre-at, gol-den eagle.”

A buxom young man joined them, fresh as new bread from Oxford. He talked golf and explained the unsportsmanlike traits of the French nation. The ladies agreed.

Christine closed her eyes, wishing that ears had the same facilities. Flowers, birds, stitches, golf. Golf, birds, stitches, flowers!

Then the two ladies leaned closer together, and she caught the words, “—that couple over there, just came in, yes, that *is* a French count and his wife, at least I suppose she is his wife—they’re from somewhere in the mountains here, you

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know you thought she was Russian, well, the name is impossible—”

The rest was sibilance. Christine was sorry. In a hotel, she had already learned, there was no fun like figuring out the other guests. Animal, vegetable, mineral—nationality, class, occupation—who are they, what are they, and are they lawfully here? The last was Lady Densham’s main preoccupation.

This couple was indeed strikingly different from the other guests. Monsieur was a big, muscular, sunburned man, a primitive, with bewildered simplicity in his face. He certainly had not the air of an aristocrat in spite of his handsome, salient features. He moved with open anguish among the plush and bamboo furniture of the hotel, his superb body unjustly encased in a frock coat and striped trousers. As he came in, that day, he knocked over a shaky console, and one could see him swear, could see too that he aimed a well-meant kick at his wife’s dog. This was a small, smooth, coal-black thing, quick as a fly. One moment it did seem to be tripping its master up, the next it was safe in the lap of its mistress, a foil for her long white hand. The tiny dog, the little, frail woman looked pathetic, towered over by the scowling man.

And yet, taken by herself, she was no more frail than a whip. She cut through a group of the other guests with an elastic grace and a silken obliviousness of their existence, which made them believe that she must be at least an ex-Grand-Duchess.

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She looked different in race from her husband. His face was all big planes, straight lines, fresh colors; hers was narrow, oval, dominated by a fine aquiline nose, not quite balanced by the chin. Her complexion was ivory parchment, her big eyes a somber, dead black. The gray in her lively curly hair, the fine lines about the mouth and eyes, proved her to be the older of the two.

She was never French, Christine thought. He might be but she was not. She was speaking French, but it was pitched in far too slow a monotone to be native, far too monotonous also for a Russian. Full of what she called scientific curiosity the girl softly left the window and sat down at the magazine table where she pretended to read the frowzy copies of English magazines left by other rainy-day guests. From there she could hear, if not the words, at least the cadence. It was, it must be, either English or American French. There was a lack of conviction about it, in spite of its fluency; it was soft, not hard—blurred, not clear-cut; it ran down hill instead of up. A curious, ill-fitting language for that clever face, that incisive presence.

Christine forgot to pretend to read. For ten minutes she hadn't turned a page, then she absent-mindedly lifted her head. The lady was gazing straight at her, smiling. The girl blushed. But the eyes held her, luminous, amused, enveloping, searching. She burned, she suffered. She felt as if her whole body were dyed by this red

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wave, this shamed heat, as if she were seen naked. She felt summed up, appraised, rejected and pigeon-holed, flatly humbled by a will definitely stronger than her own.

At last she was ignominiously released when the lady bent to pet her dog.

"Miss Tancrede!" Lady Densham's voice was slightly peevish. That girl was always straying off, saying nothing, a horrid secretive girl, really; not a girl you could take any safe, chatty comfort in. No accomplishments, no interests. French, of course, but she spoke it too well, almost like a professional. And people asked awkward questions about her, someone had just been trying to find out why she had such a companion. Mistaken loyalty to Sir William's family, that was what it was, but she would take the first chance to get rid of her. Anyway, she was put in a very difficult position by Miss Tancrede's being so young and so, well, so conspicuous.

That almost improperly yellow, shiny hair and odd solemn face. Not really pretty. And yet, she, Lady Densham, had actually been mistaken for her companion's chaperon!

"Miss Tancrede, would you see if you can find me some bromo-seltzer? There are several English chemists here, I believe, 'k-you-so-much."

Christine went off, out in the driving, cooling rain, down the wet shining streets, past shops of jewels, antiques, hats, scarfs, past several pharmacies, pensions, hotels, and then she was nearly carried off her feet by the impetuous wind from

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the sea, by the thundering rush of waves on stone.

Was she pathetic, a slight little girl in shabby clothes, overwhelmed by the storm? Except for her pale dandelion hair and fine white skin now whipped crimson one would hardly notice her small undramatic features, not quite regular. That the gray soft eyes had a searching look and the chin a certain rocky definiteness would certainly have escaped the casual stare. But she felt neither pathetic nor overwhelmed by the storm. She let herself be swept along the coast by it, leaned against its tangible arms, reveled in its force, in the tumult, the cringing tamarisks, the vast white spray, the thick black scrambling clouds. She matched it by a storm within, a curious wild pleasure in having met and been impressed by a superior strength.

There was no real strength in all the people she had known before, nothing that withstood even one's determined little finger. Much less was there anything that had ever been able to dominate for a second the essential Christine, the inner unblushing self, the free, undaunted thing that she saw soaring above fears and dangers, like the white and tranquil gull coolly sliding down the storm.

But it was dull. Dull to be so confident, so unafraid. She had always understood and sympathized with the boy in the fairy tale who wanted to know what fear was.

She thrilled for an instant to the thought that

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the storm could fling her over the cliffs, then she fought her way back into the sheltered streets.

She must try to meet the lady with the black eyes.

But first she must get the bromo-seltzer.

CHAPTER TWO

IN the drawing-room of the Hotel *Moderne et d'Albion*, Professor Phierre was going to give his world-famous demonstration of magic, chiromancy, graphology, astrology. The bright, unshaded, electric chandelier revealed all too clearly the meager empire furniture, the erased carpet, the gilt, fly-blown mirrors, the steel engravings of "Vespers" and the Battle of Marengo. All the guests were straying in, some yawning and lamenting the rain, others thrilled and interested, such as Lady Densham. She considered herself psychic. Christine had had to read famous spirit autobiographies aloud to her, and Lady Densham believed every word of them. So did her friends. They felt as sure they would survive after death, as they felt sure they had something to survive with.

Christine sat by herself, meditating on the strange name of the lady with the black eyes—who was the Comtesse de Gorostegui. When the performance began she looked around eagerly for her, not being much interested in the nimble little man who was doing card-tricks at a velvet-covered table. For days she had gone around hoping to awaken recognition in that pale, indifferent face but with no success. There she was, sitting not far to one side in front of her, but not with Monsieur de Gorostegui. She was with an elderly, stoutish lady, and a youngish man, a

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rather handsome man. Christine catalogued him cautiously. Her eye slipped idly over his clothes, not really seeing them; she vaguely noted that he was rather dark, not big, yet well and tightly built. Fresh, sensitive face. Jutting, living features and a nice smile as he watched the "professor." His lips were thin, of an American thinness. Others were aware of him. Madame de Gorostegui was sparkling, quite transformed. She might have been a young woman with hair lightly powdered. Christine drew the obvious conclusion, especially when the wife deadened and hardened as her husband came in. Yet he greeted the young man heartily, almost with relief. There was no jealousy in that. She might, of course, be his aunt. Christine hoped so.

For ever so long, as she expressed it to herself, she had had nobody to be sentimental about. When she was a child on the desert island in Chicago her lonely imagination had twined around book heroes, Brian de Bois

Guilbert in *Ivanhoe*, Petronius in *Quo Vadis*, and, naturally, D'Artagnan. But now that she thought of herself as grown-up she was more exigent. She put it that she needed a living center for soft moods, somebody definite to visualize when there was a moon, when the evening was pure blue before the lamp, when waves slapped against garden walls, when the hazy moment came before going to sleep. She had had two or three admirable centers, but when she came to know them they turned to dust. The last had been a man who

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looked both poetic and heroic when he strode past the Densham cottage every morning—he was a public accountant.

Professor Phierre was progressing from cards to chiromancy. Christine watched the back of the young man's neck. A good, firm, brown neck, strong, not brutal—Monsieur de Gorostegui's neck was really thick enough to be brutal. What a gleaming diamond pin Madame had in her hair, did she know it was unfastened? Ought she to get up and tell her? At that moment everybody got up to approach a blackboard on which the professor was now explaining the first principles of chiromancy. Gradually she made her way up next to the comtesse, she was just going to whisper to her about the pin, when, to her stupefaction, she saw that it was no longer there. Madame put up her hand as if to feel for it, glanced sharply at Christine, and began to look at the floor. Christine did not know what to do, but surreptitiously she looked too. It wasn't there. It was gone!

Quickly gliding, the lady reached the hotel proprietor and whispered to him. In two seconds he was at the only door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. Then he cleared his throat and announced rather brusquely that Madame la Comtesse de Gorostegui had dropped a very valuable diamond pin, and they would all be so glad to help her look for it, and meanwhile it would be best if nobody left the room.

There was a dead, thick silence, then a buzz of

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indignation. Lady Densham flushed with rage. "Well, I for one will not stay to be insulted," and she made for the door. "Come, Miss Tancrede," she beckoned to her. But the Honorable Miss whispered something to the proprietor who stepped toward Christine. "This Demoiselle was standing next to the Comtesse," he said. "I cannot allow her to leave the room."

Ostentatiously Lady Densham withdrew from her companion's vicinity. The girl felt all the blood rush from her face, and then inundate it. At once she saw the black burning eyes of the Comtesse fixed on her. It made her tremble. This was not the way she had hoped to attract attention to herself. But her tongue was paralyzed, and her essential unconquerable me shrank into a very small, breathless space.

Everyone was still. Madame de Gorostegui looked down, she bit her lips. Then she pulled the eclipsed professor into a corner. In a minute he raised his voice: "Mesdames, messieurs, please, it is all a joke. Somebody has picked up the pin of Madame La Comtesse, but for a joke. We are going to find it, the person who picked it up wants us to, and it's all a joke. Just another trick. Little dog going to do it. Lady's little dog. Everybody please be quiet. Silence, please!"

There was no need to ask for silence. It weighed on all now, like suspended electricity. The tension hurt. Madame de Gorostegui sat as if in a trance, all expression poured from her face, blank, stiff, her hands clenched. Her little

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dog lay curled in her lap. Suddenly it hopped down and paused quivering in the middle of the room. It seemed as if all the energy of its mistress had flowed into this black, red-eyed thing that now turned slowly around, sniffing. The guests had retreated to the walls, the Honorable Miss even behind the window curtain, yet the animal leaped straight at her. But before it even touched her skirt, she screamed, a high hysterical scream, and the pin dropped out of her handkerchief.

There was an instant's horrified silence, then a noisy confusion. The lady was led away, sobbing and protesting that it was all pre-arranged only she had been frightened by that vile thing in the end. In a twinkle the room was empty of everybody except the Comtesse, resting in apparent pale exhaustion on a sofa, and her two friends. Monsieur de Gorostegui who had watched the whole drama with livid rigidity had not gone near his wife but had disappeared with the rest.

Christine mounted the stairs last, slowly, very slowly, and as she passed Lady Densham's door it opened.

"Miss Tancrede," the voice was sourer and more drawly than ever, "help me to pack. We leave to-morrow afternoon."

Christine helped, and meanwhile Lady Densham conveyed to her that on their arrival in England she would do well to register in some employment bureau. Lady Densham did not feel

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obliged to give any particular reason, but she mentioned that all foreigners and semi-foreigners were uncongenial to her. However, Miss Tancrede could send prospective employers to her for references.

Christine thanked her and left. On the whole she was really grateful for this solution, even if a vague cloud of worry rose as to the future. She went downstairs, intending to forget about herself and see if the Comtesse had recovered.

But there was no one in the drawing-room, and now it was her turn to collapse on the sofa. She was sitting there with her hands before her face, thinking bitter thoughts, when someone sat down beside her and a light soft voice said in perfect English:

“I am so sorry this has happened. We are all going out for a cup of coffee, won’t you come with us, then we can talk.”

It was Madame de Gorostegui, entirely herself now, easy, quiet, serene, sympathetic. She named her friends, Mrs. Watts, and Mrs. Watts’s nephew, Mr. Richard Holmody.

Mrs. Watts was a large, florid lady who at once sat down by Christine and fixed her with a tender, pale blue, rather prominent eye. She spoke throatily, with quivering emotion. “You poor little girl!—But wasn’t it wonderful! Wasn’t it marvelous? I suspected that the Countess was psychic, but I couldn’t get her to own up—”

Here the others started off and Christine followed

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dumbly with Mrs. Watts who was still talking in italics.

“Such an interesting woman—Miss—er—I didn’t quite catch your name. I’m so happy I met her. Such luck that I insisted on coming down with my nephew. Naughty boy, it seems he has known her for years and never even told her he had an aunt. Of course it’s true that I only just discovered him. But don’t you think the Countess just radiates that mysterious something, I don’t know what to call it, and yet it seems to me to be the great cosmic SOMETHING, a spark of the ALL, if I may say so, incarnated in a human body. Do you believe in incarnation, Miss—er—? I

don't see how you can get around it, myself. Or how can you explain the various stages of perfection we're in? When we know that the all is complete Goodness how else can you account for what appears to be wickedness on this earth?"

She paused so dramatically that Christine felt obliged to murmur that she did not account for it. The lady continued even as they were entering the bright *patisserie* where Madame and Mr. Holmody were preceding them: "You don't account for it, my dear child, because it doesn't exist! There!" She smiled triumphantly and included the other two as they all sat down and ordered coffee. "Isn't that so, dear Countess, and you agree with me too, don't you, Dick, wickedness just simply doesn't exist. All is Goodness—"

"That woman who took my diamond pin

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too?" inquired Madame de Gorostegui, and Mrs. Watts eagerly nodded her cabbage hat. "In her too, if we would only look for it with patience and teach her how to fix her mind on the ALL. Of course, she was temporarily misled—"

"When she fixed the suspicion on me?" Christine could not help interrupting, then she wished she hadn't, because Mrs. Watts again turned a melting maternal expression on her. She was prevented from precipitating it, however, by her nephew who evidently suffered.

"Let's leave the cosmic for a minute, Aunt Fay, and be particular. What do you think, Madame? I favor the kleptomania theory, or why should a respectable English spinster make a thief of herself? So risky!"

"Mightn't she simply have wanted my pin?" Madame de Gorostegui said with gentle casualness. Christine, emboldened by the hot bitter fluid, spoke up, "I think you might call it wicked to try to fasten suspicion on me as well as taking the pin." Her voice was a bit unsteady in spite of herself, and Mr. Holmody, instantly grave, looked at her with clear kind eyes that she was to remember a long time. He looked as if he suddenly saw her, and indeed he did, she seemed to him to have a curiously unworldly yet self-possessed personality, and a morning freshness. And he felt old.

"Oh, I don't question your right to be angry," he said; then, changing his tone and addressing Madame, "But what I really want to find out is

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how you train that dog to find lost diamond pins? I never liked the animal, but that's a useful trick!"

Madame merely laughed, and Mrs. Watts spared her the trouble of answering. "Why, Dick! I'm surprised at you! Here I am, I've only just met the Countess, and yet I know that she is psychic, that the dog is merely an instrument of her mind, and you—!" She broke off, overcome.

"Aunt Fay, I beg you, don't let us wish anything on Madame that she doesn't claim herself. But let's talk about Professor Phierre and his performance—" Now he was eager, evidently on a favorite subject, Christine liked the way he smiled in the corners of his face.

"Did you notice that they nearly all took the 'Professor' seriously? Oh, not the card-tricks, but the graphology and the fortune-telling and all that. Why, they ate it up, they really looked worried when he told them their life-line was short, and they beamed when he gave them ninety years and a streak of luck. Now in my business—I am Paris correspondent for the *Philadelphia Clarion*—" he told Christine, "I run across fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, beauty-doctors, occultists, crystal-readers, snake-charmers, people who sell love philters, insanity and death philters, rejuvenation schemes that are pretty uncanny—they're not so harmless, some of those tricksters, but they're all flourishing on the fat of the land. Not just in the villages, mind you, but in Paris, London, Washington. And God

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knows what goes on in the really lost places—like the Basque mountains here! It's a great mistake to think we live in the twentieth century. Every century, back to the stone age, is walking in the streets right now, yes, and riding in automobiles." He laughed at his own excitement and finished his coffee.

With a slight chill in her heart, Christine regarded him. Of course this was what she herself believed, and yet—it was so tedious to believe you knew that there was an answer to everything, always the same answer. She thought out loud, "But it's so dull to believe that everything is a trick—there must be something we don't know the answer to—yes, I should hate to believe that there wasn't *something*—"

The instant she had used the fatal word, she regretted it, for Mrs. Watts was already reaching out a fond arm in her direction, but Madame forestalled it by rising.

“You mustn’t mind Mr. Holmody, Miss Tancrede, he will take Mrs. Watts back to their hotel now, and you and I will go back to ours. My husband is not very well, and I’ve been away too long already.”

But as soon as the two others had gone, Madame seemed to forget her husband.

“The rain has stopped, let’s go for a drive,” she said, and hailed a passing cab.

It was moonlight. The rainy rawness had turned to a warm, windy, silver-flooded night. In a few hours, the south wind, rushing up from

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Spain, from Africa, had changed November to spring. Now the moon went behind the masses of clouds tumbling over the sky, and it was black dark; now the brightness rifted doubly through. Christine sat entranced, listening to the rhythmic hoof-beats of the two fast horses, and the jingle-jingle of the harness bells. But gradually the strain and strangeness of the evening began to tell on her. The soft, black, warm violence of the wind ran under her clothes, tugged at her hair; she felt torn, bewildered, timid. The pines and mimosas moaned and swayed. The woman beside her said nothing, did nothing, they just went on and on into the open country. The threatening thunder of the surf rolled inland.

Then Madame turned and took both of the girl’s hands, brusquely, firmly. “Poor little Miss Tancrede, I don’t like that horrid woman you’re with. Do you really have to go back to her?”

The tone of emotion, of warmth, was too much for the tense and ragged nerves of Christine. She broke down. She frankly wept and told her simple story, her dull life, her wilted illusions, the lack of training that had compelled her to stay with the disdainful Lady Densham, the prospect of dismissal.

But Madame pooh-poohed her lack of training, or rather, she approved it. “There are so few girls nowadays,” she said dreamily, “who haven’t had all their fresh youth and innocence trained out of them. I have made up my mind

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that you must come with me to our castle near Arraldia. I need a companion even if Lady Densham doesn’t.”

Before the girl could recover from her astonishment both at this announcement and at the name Arraldia, Madame had told the driver to turn back. She continued talking as if Christine's consent were hardly necessary. Deftly and sympathetically she drew her out about her lack of family, of friends, of experience. She wove so light and easy a web of questions about her that Christine, hitherto used only to the matter-of-fact interest of Mademoiselle Jeanne, found herself happily confiding everything to this stranger, even that she had never been in love, though, as she truthfully confessed, it seemed to be necessary for her always to admire somebody.

The Comtesse laughed, a low dry laugh, and caught the girl by her naked arm. "You're as pure as the moon, I knew it!" she exclaimed, and almost at the same instant Christine felt a sharp scratch. "Oh, that silly pin," the woman wailed, "I still had it in my hand," and before Christine could stop her she had put her hot lips to the wound. "Danger of blood-poisoning," she explained, and added, "How fresh and sweet your blood is, I saw it the day you blushed for me. Do you remember, I caught you looking at me?"

Christine laughed, and before they arrived back at the hotel she had promised to leave Lady Densham at once, and go to the mountains the next morning early with Madame de Gorostegui.

CHAPTER THREE

DURING the night, in the cooling bareness of the hotel room, while she was packing her few belongings, Christine decided that after all she wouldn't go until she had asked a few questions—what work would she have to do, and where, and for how much and for how long—in short she decided to be as practical and clear-headed as she prided herself on being. She had been whirled off her feet by the night and the sympathy of Madame and the meanness of Lady Densham, but in the morning she would be different, stand firm on her feet and her rights.

But in the morning, when Madame came to her door and asked if she were ready, she meekly answered yes. It was impossible to ask anything of that closed face, that sealed English manner which says louder than words that any question would be an impertinence. To penetrate that, one must be English oneself, and Christine felt without a country. Was the Comtesse English? Last night certainly not, this morning certainly yes. And was there the faintest undulation of a cockney accent there?

Christine scolded her absurd imagination, picked up her little bag, left a grandly dignified note for Lady Densham, and followed her new employer.

Monsieur de Gorostegui was to meet them at the station. No sooner did he see them than he ran up to his wife and practically shook his fist

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in her face. The girl could hardly understand his odd, burry French, but there was something about, "I will not endure it, I will not endure it!" Then he turned, nearly crushed Christine's arm in his grip, and exclaimed, "Go back to your own country, go back, we don't want you, go away!"

But Madame was making signs behind his back not to pay attention, and she understood that this was one of his attacks. In fact, when his wife spoke to him in an intense undertone, he seemed to collapse. She had warned Christine the night before not to mind what her husband might do or say. He was not well. She had brought him to Biarritz to see a doctor. He had a bad heart disease, which made him—peculiar. She did not say, slightly insane, but that was implied. But during the whole journey, changing from one train to another and again changing, not a word was spoken. Madame seemed to sleep with her dog in her lap, Monsieur quietly told his beads.

Could it be that he was unbalanced, and would she have much to do with him? She wished they had not had to leave so early; she might have been able to see that nice Mr. Holmody and ask his advice. Now it was too late, here they were at their station.

All fears were forgotten in the admirable landscape around, in the reassuring sunlight. A large, open, lazy barouche with two arching horses waited for them. Monsieur shoved the coachman

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aside, took the reins himself, and they began to mount a winding road.

By the magic of the south wind in this country, it was now almost like summer, luminous blue sky, warm silvery sunshine. They followed a gleaming river for a while, deep smooth dark depths in it, brimmed with light. The mountain sides looked near enough to touch in the clear air, they were so fresh, so luminous, they seemed to have been washed in some crystal liquid. They had an unearthly purity, a ravishing clarity of ocher, red, dark velvety green, old tapestry blue, all dipped in the intensity, the freshness, that rain and the soft sea air shed like enchantment on the Basque country.

In a short while they were as if “away.” Not a house nor a human being in sight. Around them the shouldering hills, and beyond their bright vivid softness a high, boldly swung mountain, dim violet blue, the deepest contrast. Towards it they drove. It was another world than the stone and cement of Biarritz, and it was inhabited by other beings. Down in a ravine men were cutting the golden-brown, golden-red bracken, and loading it on an ox-cart. Tall, harmonious men, swinging their scythes. Others were silhouetted on a hill, dressed in white, slashed by red scarfs, topped by little black berets. They bent and rose gracefully, and they all looked rather like Monsieur de Gorostegui.

When the road became a cart track they drove into a large, unkempt park down through an

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alley of plantains. At the end of it rose a real castle. A pang of joy shot through the girl to see this fantastic pile of loopholed towers golden against dark pines, ivied walls, moss and machicolations. Ancient, gabled, irregular stables crouched around it, and there was, too, a silence so thick and tangible that it seemed breathless, all around. Christine wondered that no

one came forward to meet them. She barely spied a large woolly dog half hidden behind a wall from where it darted silently to greet the young coachman when he passed with the empty carriage.

The Gorosteguis and Christine waited, Madame with her sleep-walking expression, Monsieur dark and sullen. But in a few minutes a high, nail-studded door opened. On the threshold a creature met them. Except for the skirts one would hardly call it a woman. She was tall, aged, earth-colored, yet her small dark eyes were alive and stinging. Her thin lips were framed by long black beard-like hairs. She mumbled and ducked, and the Comtesse said brightly to Christine that this was the housekeeper, good old Necato, who would take her to her room.

Rather reluctantly the girl followed this apparition up a dim circling stairway in the west tower. She unlocked a door, Christine entered, Necato disappeared. The room was whitewashed and simply furnished, but it had an amazing view that stretched over rolling hills, abrupt mountains and a far glimpse of the sea. Still there was no time to lose over the view if she wanted to dress before dinner.

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She undressed and bent over the old-fashioned wash-stand. But before she slipped off her chemise a little noise made her turn, the door was ajar. Madame's black dog came running up to her, sniffing at her, showing its pointed white teeth. She called out, suspecting a face at the door. In came Necato, sidling towards her, apologizing in strange French, and saying she just wanted to make sure everything was there. Then she suddenly put her bony hand on Christine's shoulder and pinched it hard, grinning and mouthing. The girl jumped back and cried out, and the creature ran away. But it made her quiver with repulsion, it was as if a toad had touched her.

Resolved that she would stop this sort of thing at once, she told Madame de Gorostegui about it at dinner, which they had alone together, lost in a great gloomy hall. And Madame was so sorry, so apologetic that Christine almost pitied her.

Not only had she to live in this out-of-the-way, medieval place, she explained, with a—peculiar husband, but she was obliged to retain this weird family heirloom of a Necato, who was decidedly touched, but harmless, absolutely harmless, and really very good about keeping the other servants in order.

She also told Christine that until Monsieur got better her meals would be sent to her room.

"I should have asked you long ago how my meals will be earned," the girl said, seeing her chance.

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"Ah," Madame exclaimed, lighting a cigarette, "don't mention work, my dear child. You will be doing me the greatest service simply by staying in the house. Think of the next few weeks as a holiday for you. I'm sure you need it. Be lazy, do nothing but rest yourself and get fat. When my experiment is finished I can enjoy your companionship."

"What experiment?" Christine was bolder.

Madame blew smoke rings. "Oh, I have had a chemical laboratory installed in the east tower. I had to do something. It's my only refuge. I'll show it to you sometime; just now I allow no one in it except that silly Necato; I don't care if she explodes!"

For several days after that brief talk, Christine did not even get a glimpse of the Comtesse or of her husband. Or of anybody, except Catalin, apparently the only servant besides the coachman and Necato. Catalin was a grave, beautiful girl who brought her her meals, and who wouldn't talk, perhaps did not even understand French.

At first she liked it. She had never been so soothingly, so satisfyingly at peace. It was the very first real holiday she had ever had, and her soul bathed in its clear, lovely stillness. For hours she did nothing except sit at her window and watch the light and shadow on the mountains. One soared nobly up, a high, square crest, crowned in mists shot with purple and watery gold, below it the lesser hills billowed down,

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lighter and darker symphonies of dewy greens and blues.

The rain had set in again after the brief brilliant respite, and she walked very little except in the somber park. Underneath her sleepy musings she had a warm, comforting, half-awake feeling that, in a sense, she was not alone. Richard Holmody was there, safely ensconced in the niche that she hated to have empty, and when she chose she could pull the curtain aside and consider him. But for the present the knowledge that he was there was

enough, she put off frankly thinking about him as one puts off anything delicious to savor even the delay.

Meanwhile she tried to grow a sense of mystery. At first, of course, it was mysterious enough to be living in a veritable castle, but in a short time she almost ceased to notice the loop-holed towers, the black circling stairs, the vaulted corridors.

Then she tried to plunge into nature, to be awed by it, to make it answer her shy craving for an emotion she would never have called religious. Mademoiselle Jeanne had been dryly non-sectarian and for this reason Christine had a hazy yearning to believe something. And when she looked at the dark-blue mountain crest, half-hidden in a white cloud, she did thrill for a moment to the thought of a veiled, elemental earth-god, but in the next moment it seemed to her a lump of granite, after all, a wart on an insignificant planet. The mysterious veil was only

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rain in abeyance. It was a fixed, an explicable thing.

The sea was not fixed. It rose and fell strangely. It had fierce moods, raging will. But in the Hotel *Moderne et d'Albion*, in that shabby soulless place, hung a fly-specked, little tide calendar which the heaving monster meekly followed.

The moon? The moon rising in warm gold, and risen in cold silver, over the black trees. But she knew it was dead, a luminous corpse. It had to shed borrowed light on the earth at stated intervals. A thing, a predictable thing.

But the small speck of a man climbing the mountain, you couldn't tell what he would do. Or what the non-appearing inhabitants of this castle were about. Uneasily she realized that for them she had no calendar. The holiday palled.

One night she was slowly dragged out of her sleep by dreaming that someone with a light was bending over her bed. She woke up, was she still dreaming, or had someone just closed the door? She hopped out of bed, fumbled through the dark into the hall, and from there she saw a light on the stairs, moving, flickering, hurriedly descending. Not thinking, not stopping to be frightened, she flew after it, bare feet and all. It was a small person, or a child; she could see it, she reached it, caught it by the shoulder.

It was a boy of twelve or thirteen. He said not

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a word, but stood as if inert, letting her take the candlestick from his hand and place it on a step, letting himself be shaken gently by her while she showered questions on him. He had black curly hair, a pale oldish face, half filled by large dark eyes. Suddenly, out of this apparent apathy, there came a scream, high and piercing. Christine was so startled, she let go her hold. He was off down the stairs again, quick as a ferret, but she was quicker, and caught him. Then he struggled and kicked and shrieked, so twisting and contorting that she could hardly hold him.

Why didn't those fantastic cries bring somebody? How could anybody sleep through it? Ah, the imp was biting her now!

She began to call for help herself, exhausted, and fearing that the mystery would succeed in escaping. With joy she heard the heavy door below being opened, heard light, hasty steps, saw the flash of a lantern.

It was Madame.

"Hush, Max!" she cried, and the boy again became an inert mass in the hands of Christine. Madame took hold of him, flung a corner of her large dark mantle around him.

"Help me, Miss Tancrede, I'm afraid he's going to be ill," and she pointed to a door. It opened on a small hooded salon with a long sofa. On this they laid the boy, who was rigid one moment and twisting in convulsions the next. Christine noted, however, that when Madame's

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back was turned, he opened one eye and considered her coolly. Then he screamed, got bluish purple in the face, and it took a long while and much petting to quiet him.

At last, to Madame's repeated, "But what were you doing over here, my darling?" he answered sullenly that Necato had told him there was someone in the west tower whom he would be let play with, and he wanted to see who it was.

Madame gave a pearly, relieved laugh. "Oh, my dearest, Necato is mistaken. Miss Tancrede is going to be for me to play with, not for you."

The boy sat up and stared avidly at Christine, who realized that she had almost nothing on and was shivering. Madame took off her mantle and made her put it on, then she said sternly to Max, who was grinning and pointing at the girl, "Not another word from you!"

He fell back, and she continued with a sudden sob in her voice, "This is my son, Maxwell Brickman, by my first husband, Miss Tancrede, I beg

your pardon a thousand times for all the trouble he has given you. I must tell you that Monsieur de Gorostegui is most unkind to this poor child, so I am obliged to keep him hidden with me nearly all the time. I had intended to let you get acquainted with him after a while. He is difficult. He is not at all well, he walks in his sleep, as you have seen, for one thing. I—” she crushed her face in her hands.

Impressed and touched, the girl stretched the truth a point and said she would like to be allowed

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to help care for him, but Madame energetically shook her head.

“Only I know how to manage him. But I shall need all the consolation of your company here when he goes away to school in England. For he will have to be sent away to school!”

Hearing this, Max began to writhe in another convulsion, and his mother rose hastily. “Go back to bed, Miss Tancrede. Try not to be too bored here. Remember you are resting and getting strong. I’ll soon be able to attend to you. If it’s fine to-morrow, why don’t you walk down to the village, it’s not far. Distract yourself. Goodnight!”

Christine mounted the many steps, weary and puzzled. The other night she had heard something like an animal moaning. Was it this highly unpleasant little boy? Poor Madame de Gorostegui. If she didn’t feel sorry for her, and if she had any other place in the world to go to, and if she weren’t curious—she would leave. But she was very curious.

What could be the matter with Monsieur, who had looked like the incarnate god of health? She hadn’t seen him since the day of her arrival. She hadn’t seen anyone else except Catalin and a fleeting glimpse of Corneille, the coachman, and his big dog. In the court-yards there was little sign of life. Creepers and spider-webs sealed most of the doors, except for a stable with two horses; moss and grass half hid the cobble-stones, parts of the building were plainly falling into

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ruins. Nobody ever seemed to come there. She tossed nervously about in her bed, her attention straining at every sound in the dark, and the things that puzzled her took on huge and gloomy shapes.

In the morning, waking to a sunlit day, she laughed at herself and thought it quite natural that a woman with a difficult child and a queer husband should choose a secluded life. Just the same, if anybody in the village could understand French, she meant to ask a few questions.

She had seen Arraldia from afar the day they drove from the station. It was further up the river, perched on a rocky hill, a cluster of white houses around a massive church. She followed the river now, rejoicing in the pure, warm, miraculous November sunshine. Rows of slender trees mirrored their trembling little yellow leaves and white-patched trunks in the smooth, dark depths. The road wound up past reddish quarries, bushes with gleaming leaves, bright yellow gorse bloom, trees in autumn russet touched with scarlet. Where it turned abruptly above a low gray wall she stopped and looked over. Far down was the shining stream, willow-bordered, and a fresh green bit of meadow with two creamy white oxen. The sight of their large placidity relaxed the last tension in her, and, gently humming, she walked into Arraldia at the end of the road.

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The white houses, timbered in blue or green or red, dozed behind their guardian plantains. The public square was empty. A donkey slept by a post. Then the doors of a house flew open and a flock of shrill children burst out, chattering in sing-song Basque. Only two little girls, stopping to show each other pictures in a book, were speaking French. A tall elderly priest striding by, hawk-nosed, bushy-browed, cocked an ear at them, then he darted over and shook each child vehemently, saying something over and over again.

Christine turned away, uncomfortable at the evident terror of the little girls. On the school-house steps she saw a young woman, probably the teacher, also watching the scene. When the priest had let the children go and they had scuttled away like frightened rabbits, Christine walked up to the young woman in whose face she thought she saw indignation equal to her own.

"I beg you to excuse me," she said smiling. "I am a foreigner and don't understand Basque, but I should like to know what Monsieur le curé was saying to those girls, and what they had done?"

The teacher had seen in a lightning glance that her interlocutor was a foreigner, a person without connections in the village, and as she was too angry in any case to be cautious she plumped right out: "Monsieur le curé was saying, 'Will

you talk Basque, you good-for-nothings, will you talk Basque!’—You see, they had been talking French, that was their crime!”

“But—why—?”

“Understand that I am not Basque,” the young woman went on, “I am from Provence, but I have learned enough of their language to know what he was saying. And although I am French I am treated as much like a foreigner by them as you would be! Oh, these Basques!”

“I don’t really know anything about them,” Christine said tentatively.

“And you never will. I have lived here now most of my life and I don’t know them. And you are only visiting, I suppose?”

“Not exactly, that is, I am to be the companion of the Comtesse de Gorostegui.”

“Ah, the old place up in the hills, yes—the Comtesse de Gorostegui.”

Christine thought she leaned a little oddly on the last words. “You—know them?” she ventured.

“Oh, only what the silly people around here say,” her bright, keen face with the narrow brown eyes hardened and she changed the subject. “Have you seen the sights of Arraldia? There is a curious old cemetery up there,” she pointed to the church, “and the view is superb. Permit me to walk in that direction with you, I am going home.”

They went along together, Mademoiselle keeping off all possible inquiries by discoursing on the

clannishness, the ignorance, the backwardness of the Basques. The language in the government school was, naturally, she explained, French, and the children learned it easily; but certain persons wouldn’t let them speak it for fear they might escape into the world. The Basques were the oldest people in Europe, no one knew where they came from, no one had traced their language, and they were prouder than the devil of their exclusiveness; they would tolerate no intrusion. She herself had only been able to escape persecution by observing the strictest neutrality. And even so they had torn up her flowers and killed her chickens. But that was in the beginning. Now she was let alone. Too much alone. She had no company except her old mother. There was not even a cinema.

As she stopped in front of a neat cottage, she held out her hand, "My name is Casenave; I hope I shall see you again. We are both foreigners here."

Christine was already on her way to the church when Mademoiselle Casenave caught up with her again. "Excuse me," she whispered, "but did you notice the big white crosses on the doors we just passed? Well, to prove to you how backward they are, these Basques, they make those crosses there to protect themselves from witches. From witches!—*au revoir*." She was off again, stepping daintily. She fairly left the air vibrating with her hot, clear, practical positiveness. There at last was a tangible person.

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The church rose up before Christine, a strong, rude peasant church of yellowish stone, with a square tower, and under it the usual archway and stairs going up to the men's galleries. Narrow dilapidated stone steps led up to the churchyard, crowning the very summit of Arraldia.

From here there was a view of all the mountains along the gleaming river, a calm, grand, tranquillizing view, great planes of blue and purple, of vivid greens and soft orange. Guarded from the world by the church and the tall black yews, the little grave-yard slept in the sunshine. The girl moved lightly among its mossy paths, gray weathered stones, curious crosses. On the oldest graves the cross was a plain swastika, sometimes it was not a cross at all, but a sort of wheel. Or the radiating disk of the sun?

These Basques, these Basques—she felt subtly drawn to them in the golden stillness. Had Mademoiselle Jeanne, her childhood's nurse, been of this race? She must have been, and therefore she had mentioned Arraldia at the last. Perhaps her mother had disapproved of something concerning it, had felt like Mademoiselle Casenave. But she thought no more about it, moving careless and tranquil in the quietude.

How badly the Arraldian must feel who could not lie buried here, cupped in the peace of his own mountains. Below the crest of the cemetery, there was a stretch of tilled land before the next hill rose up. A man, tall, lean-flanked, was plowing it with a team of dignified, cream-

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colored oxen. His little son marched in front of them with the inevitable long stick, taking himself very seriously. The man uttered long melodious cries to the oxen, they paced along sedately, divine, processional animals.

Following the plow came another man, a bag tucked under one arm, the other flying out in the immemorial gesture of the sower. How the Arraldian ancestors must enjoy it from the top of their peaceful hill, Christine thought. It was like Greek friezes, pastoral poems, the idyls of the golden age. She wondered if those lithe men, so handsome in their white and red, were really as calm as they looked, and if they loved tilling the soil under the very eyes of the ancestors. Or would they prefer to be in factories? Did they miss the cinema?

She laughed aloud and decided that the hawk-nosed, bushy-browed priest had been right. Even including and implying witches, it was best that a thorny language and steel traditions should guard them as long as possible from the world.

Madame de Gorostegui was surely not Basque. Monsieur was. What ailed him? What was the matter with the castle?

Slowly and thoughtfully she walked back.

When Catalin came with the tray, Christine always had an embarrassed impulse to snatch it and offer it to her. That anyone so proudly beautiful should serve seemed unfitting. Catalin was of middle height, supple, firm and

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strong. She was a peasant girl in build, with large hands and feet, but her head was classic. Her nose was straight with the forehead, yet it had not the rather sheep-like look of the Greek, the nostrils arched curiously high. Her eyes were far apart, large and utterly sky-blue, shaded by deep black lashes, framed by straight black brows that almost met. The mass of her simply coiled black hair contrasted vividly with her pure skin and rosy cheeks. And yet, in spite of these exquisite colors, she was like a statue, but a statue stilly concentrated and fixed on something. She reminded one of Joan of Arc, simple, beautiful, almost terrible, a bit of elemental nature brooding before it strikes.

Gradually, starting with the weather, Catalin was induced to talk about herself, never about the people of the castle—there she was mute as a wall. But she revealed the interior fire over which her soul was bending.

She was Basque, of course, and had come to the more prosperous Arraldia to earn her living. One day she had been wrongfully accused of stealing two forks by a woman whose name she fairly spat out, la mère

Doyenard. And although she had offered a bi-weekly candle to the Virgin of Lourdes and a tri-weekly one to the Virgin of Pilar, her innocence had not been established. She lost her place.

“Nobody in Arraldia would take me, nobody but the Comtesse. Ah, that Virgin of Lourdes, and that one of Pilar—they played me a bad

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trick, they get no more candles from me, no, no! I have found someone better!”

“You mean, Catalin?”

Catalin appeared not to hear, wrapped in her still loveliness. “I have wished things on the Doyenard, things that have happened, and if I get permission still more things will happen. The curé wouldn’t help me, that pig of a woman has a big farm and husband and sons, and I am only a poor servant girl—luckily there is one who will help even us—”

“Isn’t it lucky!” said Christine vaguely.

Catalin’s face lit up. “Yes, and it was he who told Madame to take me. It seems that even foreigners come here to worship the Master, as Madame wants to, and Mademoiselle, too, I suppose, or she would not have come here?”

Christine looked her frank bewilderment, and Catalin, as if she had said too much, suddenly fled.

A great wonder stirred in the girl as to what “Master,” what deity, the Basquaise had found when the two powerful goddesses of Lourdes and Pilar had failed her. And what did the ignoramus mean by mixing Madame up in it?

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CHAPTER FOUR

IN the bland yellow light from the oil lamp, Christine sat in her room, quietly enjoying the chief of her female accomplishments, *petit point*. She took an odd, definite delight in pulling the soft woolen threads through the canvas, in the neat subtly colored stitches that so soon aligned themselves. It was soothing. She could think at this kind of work if she wanted to, and yet she did not need to. In one corner of her mind she wondered if Richard Holmody ever visited his friends the Gorosteguis, and in another corner she thought she would like to copy the bit of old tapestry she had seen in the room where they had brought that boy Max the other night. But from that thought sprang one which filled her whole mind with shuddering discomfort.

During the morning she had been wandering about the grassy and deserted court-yards when she heard a barking and a howling, a little sharp, eager bark and a deep agonized howl. Running towards the sounds, she had found young Monsieur Max enjoying himself. The coachman's Pyrenean sheep dog was tied to a tree, and Madame's little black brute was hopping around it, barking with apparent delight every time the boy touched the other dog with a stick and made it howl.

But when she reached them she saw with sickening

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horror that it was not a stick, but a poker, white-hot in one end, with which he was branding the poor animal.

She leaped at once on the boy and wrested the poker from him, at the same time kicking at the black imp snarling at her heels. Max stood a second, gibbering with rage, then turned to run; but the shaggy dog, which had been straining and tugging at the rope, suddenly tore loose and in one mighty bound hurled itself at its tormentor. Down Max went on the ground, and the big animal stood over him, but instead of biting it turned its head questioningly towards Christine.

Stunned at first, she recovered and rushed at the dog, who reluctantly let itself be dragged away from its vengeance.

At that moment Madame arrived, pale and breathless, having seen from a distance, the rescue, as she termed it, of her boy from the ferocious brute.

Her voice quivered, and real tears were in her eyes as she pressed Christine's hands and promised her eternal gratitude. Then she turned to Necato, who came sidling after her and ordered the dog to be shot. But Christine begged as the only bit of gratitude she wanted that the dog might be let live and she explained with some heat what Max had done to it.

Madame frowned a little, but consented, adding that her boy was of a remarkable scientific turn of mind. He had probably just been conducting some experiment on the dog.

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The two women carried off the half-conscious Max, and Christine ran to her room for vaseline, which she returned to put on the burns of the Pyrenean. It moaned and licked her hands, its large brown eyes full of almost human tears. Heavy-hearted she took it into the stable, where the coachman, the chubby Corneille, startled her by emerging from a stall and telling her he had seen what she had done and would not forget it. Odd that he should have been afraid to go to the rescue of his dog himself.

The girl sighed and put down her embroidery. No, she could not stay in this somber place. And yet, Madame had been quite different that morning after what had happened. She had been genuinely cordial, there was no pretense about it, she even said she would soon, very soon, let Christine work in the laboratory and teach her things, wonderful things, new discoveries to benefit them both. What if a mother were fatuous about her child! And if she left—but she would not leave. She picked up her embroidery again and considered whether the darker or the lighter mauve would be best.

The night was so quiet, so blackly quiet. She had a key for her door now, nobody could burst in on her. She drew a deep breath of contentment and looked around her little, whitewashed room, her little fortress. She wasn't disquieted by the sound below, as if somebody were opening the big door; it might be Catalin bringing up wood for the fire.

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Heavy, slow, dragging steps up the long stairs. That was not Catalin. She began to listen tensely. The steps were coming up to her room, surely, they sounded nearer, heavier, she could hear too that somebody was panting as if every move were an effort. And then at last they stopped right outside her door, they hesitated, shifted, and there was a timid little knock.

“Who is there?”

“Gorostegui.” It was a man’s voice, hoarse, low.

“I cannot open—I—am undressed.”

“Open, open, for God’s sake!” He still spoke low but with a fierce intenseness.

She wondered wildly if she ought to call for help. He was mad, he must be mad.

As if in answer to her fear, he said: “I am not mad, but they are killing me, and you can save me. For God’s sake, open! From the window I saw you save the poor dog. Open!”

The girl rose, compelled by the anguish of the voice, and, much against her better judgment, she unlocked the door.

Then she stepped back with a half cry, for there in the lamplight against the dark of the hall stood something that was more like a ghost than a human being. Wrapped in a white dressing-gown, Monsieur de Gorostegui looked even taller and more gaunt than he was. His face was nothing but waxen skin over protruding bones, holding two glittering feverish eyes.

He swayed against the door to steady himself

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and muttered rapidly as if afraid of being overheard: “I thought you had come to be in league with them, but I saw this morning you are a Christian, so help me, in the name of Jesus, Mary and all the saints—I am a prisoner in my own house. They are killing me, and pretending to nurse me, pretending I am mad!”

“What can I do,” she stammered. “The police?”

“Folly!” He raised a long bony hand. “They would shut me up!”

Down below the great door ground on its heavy hinges. His face twisted in rage and fear. “She has found me, but remember, you must go to the curé of Arraldia, tell him I am dying—black witchcraft—they know the devil himself! Don’t let her know, if you value your life, and shut the door now!”

Christine was glad to shut it and lock it and sink into her arm-chair, vainly trying to embroider, listening instead with her whole taut body.

Outside there was a thud as if he had fallen. Then light hurried steps up the stairs, low voices, Madame’s and Necato’s. They groaned and whispered, they were lifting him up, carrying him down—Lord, how could they, he must have shrunk to the bare bones.

She waited, motionless. Ah, there was the door again—now what would she say when Madame came, with her keen eyes, to question her? Clearly, he was mad, but should she tell everything?

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Had they been heard talking? It was hardly possible, and yet—

“No, Madame,” she found herself saying when the lady had come in and was sitting panting and disheveled on her bed, “No, Madame, I was too frightened to open when he knocked, and then he began talking, but it was in Basque, and I didn’t understand a word of it; perhaps you heard him as you were coming up?”

“No, I didn’t.” Madame de Gorostegui drew a deep sigh and rested her head in her hands. “I am exhausted! It is too much! I don’t know what I can say to you, Miss Tancrede. In this house the family skeletons won’t stay in their cupboards, they all come to your room; you have the misfortune of being the only stranger here and my family skeletons are curious. Don’t think I am heartless to speak that way about my poor, sick husband and my difficult child. But you can understand now why I have hidden myself from the world. My husband is worse, much worse. He has now lost his physical health; long ago I knew he was losing his mind. I am not so old as my gray hair and my yellow skin, Miss Tancrede. I am still a young woman, really I ought to be as blooming as you are—but I have gone through too much!”

She buried her face in the pillow, and Christine could see she was sobbing. Her heart melted.

“You can count on me in any case, Madame. I’ll stay, if you want me to, and if I can be of any help whatsoever.”

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”Yes, dear child,” Madame sat up, her features now under control, “you can be of the very greatest help to me, but later, and not in this matter. You are too young for these things, and we want to keep you young! I dislike Necato, but she is strong and discreet, and she saves me most of the hard labor. When I find that school for Max, which ought to be soon, you and I will work together. Bear with this miserable house a little while longer.”

Christine felt the fire of generous sympathy kindle within her, and when Madame said goodnight, skimming her forehead with light, dry lips, she would have done anything for a woman so unhappy and so brave. And since nothing was requested of her except to have patience, patience she

would have. It was, to say the least, not nice, the way she had been reading dark secrets into inevitable personal tragedies.

CHAPTER FIVE

LAPPED again in the easy feeling that these were holidays, Christine was waiting in the pelote ground of Arraldia to see a fête-day procession with Mademoiselle Casenave. The pelote ground was a long, grassy rectangle, frontons at each end, stone seats at the third side, and completely open on the opposite fourth. Below that was a valley, and beyond the mountains rose up, lilac, blue, vivid green in the afternoon sun, cloud-shadows hovering over them. There was a tranquillity, a radiant peace over the world, a hushed religious mood that seemed to wait for solemn harmonies.

But instead the stillness was shattered by sounds of the liveliest, strangest music, wild, sweet, inciting—fifes, drums, horns, and into the pelote ground swung the procession, led by the tall old curé, who was everywhere, commanding, pointing, leading. Two by two they marched, first the men, bronzed farmers down from the mountains, devoutly singing *Laudate Dominum* across the music, primitive, deeply lined, austere faces, like so many wood-carvings passing by. After them came little elfish boys, then the white and red choir-boys swinging censers and carrying silver lanterns, and then the huge, gold, sun-like Sacrament carried by the vicar, over him an embroidered dais held by four ancient cowed men and fiercely escorted by four tall Sappers marching

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with their axes. After them a tambour-major twirling his stick and preceding the musicians, then youths in white with red berets and scarfs, followed by dainty files of girls in white with long floating vestal veils and wreaths of white roses, shining against the greensward and the far blue of the mountains. Like a *memento mori* the old women of the village, entirely in black and hooded in long black veils, closed the procession. The very last of these specters turned and pointedly made the sign of the cross in the direction of the two girls.

Hardly believing that this attention could be for them, Christine looked behind her, and there she did see another onlooker quite far in the background, leaning against a tree. It was a tall Basque, of the purest archaic type, dressed in blue jeans like a fisherman from the coast, but with

a bearing and mien so proudly dignified as if the procession were defiling in his honor alone. For one brief instant he glanced back at Christine, but with a look so darkly contemptuous that she felt cast out, a miserable intruder.

She was sufficiently impressed to ask her companion if she knew who he was, but Mademoiselle dismissed him as another of those Basques, but not one from this parish or he would have been in the procession. She assured Christine bitterly that the curé had the village well under control.

Indeed, the curé looked every inch a general. No High Inquisitor ever had more intensely burning, deeply socketed eyes, no sterner, grimmer,

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straighter mouth. His thick, grizzled hair was uncovered, his long nose cleaved the air, he had the voice, the gestures of absolute imperialism. If the laudates weakened, he pointed a finger and they swelled again. If a child fell out of line he pounced at once.

Christine gazed at him, fascinated. Was it not for him that poor Monsieur de Gorostegui had charged her with a message that night he came so crazily to her room? But even if he hadn't been insane, she would never have dared to approach the curé—that face, those eyes. They would pierce right into her unbeliefs, and—“Why, he would have you burned!” she said half aloud, but Mademoiselle's quick ear seized it.

“Who? What?” she looked curiously at Christine, who felt embarrassed and at the same time surged with the desire to ask this sensible person about a few of the things that puzzled her. “The curé—” she began, but Mademoiselle put an alarmed finger to her lip, and they sat silent until the procession had disappeared in the direction of an ancient cross beyond the pelote ground. First then did the Frenchwoman say in a low voice, “Ah, yes, you are right, that man would do anything. You saw how he shook the children for talking French. He is a very Basque of the Basques!”

“What puzzles me,” Christine said, attempting to be casual, “is how a lady, a foreigner like Madame de Gorostegui, happened to marry a Basque. You see,” she explained, “I really don't

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know the people at the castle. I came there quite by accident.”

Mademoiselle shot a quick glance at her. “By accident?”

Realizing that it took confidence to unlock confidence, Christine took the plunge and quite simply and honestly told the story of her life, the hermetic isolation in Chicago, the dreary round with Lady Densham, and the melodramatic way in which fate had sent her to the Gorosteguis. But here she stopped. She couldn't get herself to mention their private affairs. All she said was that she saw very little of her employers, and knew less of them, except that Monsieur was ill.

Mademoiselle was luckily not of those slow souls who need direct questions, and she had quite made up her mind that in telling things to an outsider she was not dangerously committing herself. Also she, being truly of the *midi*, loved dearly to tell a dramatic tale.

"I'll tell you," she commenced, "all I know of what seems to me to be facts. I'll spare you the fantastic gossip of these Basques." Her brown, bright eyes sparkled and her fine little hands began already to weave gestures in the air.

"Figure to yourself one sunny lovely November afternoon, like this one, a couple of years ago. The men are out on the hillsides cutting the bracken, and among them is plain Pacheco Gorostegui. He wasn't a count then, let me tell you.

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But he was the handsomest man in the village, and you know, I must admit, that when these Basques set out to be handsome—! And he was Basque to the core. Though he knew French, he wouldn't speak it. He always dressed in the old style. He and his widowed mother went to church together. He was as pious as she was and just as ferociously proud.

"You can imagine how the two of them were by this: there was a sister, a charming girl, and a doctor from Biarritz fell in love with her and she with him. He offered to marry her, even without a dot. Do you think they would let her? No, he was only a Frenchman. Not good enough for a Basquaise. Those two devils prevented that marriage, and the girl simply wasted away and died. They killed her with their pride.

"Now, to go back to the beautiful afternoon when the men are out cutting bracken. Pacheco is working near the road. He is in white with the red scarf. He looks his best and a lady driving her own car is so charmed looking at him that she drives into the ditch. Not much hurt, but she pretends to be, and Pacheco, coming to the rescue, picks her up and carries her to the nearest farm, which is theirs. Now, people say that already while

he was carrying her she used her big black eyes to such effect that he fell fatally in love with her, how that is I don't know, but anyway the fact is that in two weeks he went to his mother and announced that he meant to marry the strange lady.

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"He, who had driven his own sister to death because she wanted to marry a foreigner!

"His mother threatened to curse him, and that still means something in this country. But he was like a man in a trance, and he disappeared with her.—I couldn't tell you what her name was, we couldn't pronounce it.—Well, his mother did curse him and died with rage, leaving all the property they owned to the church. A year ago he came back, very much thinner and quieter, not speaking to anybody, but, if you please, with the title of count, which it appears she had bought for him. And she also bought that old half-ruined château, and there they have been living since. I don't know anything more about them, nobody ever goes near them, and they never come here, but of course there are rumors. They say she was the daughter of a rag-picker in your London, and found protectors, and lost her youth and beauty, but had laid money enough aside to buy herself this handsome young man. But that's wretched gossip and clearly not true, because money alone could not have got her Pacheco Gorostegui. No, he wasn't like that!"

Mademoiselle stopped. For a moment her bright definite face almost softened, then she jumped to her feet and shook out the possible creases in her skirt. "I'm sorry he's ill. But you may be sure that foreign wife or no foreign wife, papal count or no papal count, he would always have been hopelessly Basque underneath.

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They don't change. Not in hating foreigners. Did you see the look that man who was watching the procession gave us? He is not from this parish, but he was Basque, and we were intruders."

Christine had seen it. Indeed his anger had flashed out so darkly that she had noticed it more than him. But as they were walking through the village she thought she saw the tall blue figure going up towards the square, from which came music and noise. She wanted to go there too, to see what the Arraldians did to amuse themselves if their solemnities were so gay, but Mademoiselle refused to accompany her. She was even a little angry.

“I know this country, my friend, and you do not. I advise you to go home as soon as possible. It is already twilight. In the square they are dancing, getting drunk, fighting. I don’t know who that tall man in blue is who gave us that poisoned look, but I know that when he comes here there is a fight.”

“Between whom—why?”

Mademoiselle was gently pulling her along, away from the exciting tumult in the square. She went on talking, “Oh, neither you nor I could ever understand these savages. If I told you what I have pieced together of their talk you would think it too absurd. Fantastic! You can judge for yourself when I tell you that they say the people in this part of the country have always been divided into two factions. On the

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subject of witchcraft. Yes! You saw the white crosses on the doors. And part of the gossip about Pacheco Gorostegui’s wife is that she is a witch! They say she must be or she couldn’t have got him, a true son of the church and a Basque, to marry her. And they say that the gypsy she has in her service, this Necato, had some private grudge against Pacheco’s mother and obliged Madame by bewitching her to death. Though how silly that is, when she is still in their service!”

“But the factions?”

“Well, the curé is supposed to be the head of one, and in charge of a special band of witch-hunters who would kill a woman like Necato if ever she left the castle and the authorities would never hear of it. The other faction is supposed to be—now I beg of you—in favor of witch-craft and commandeered by some Prince of Darkness whom they call the Devil! And they say that the man we just saw is that very one. What I think is that he is a smuggler and likes to play on their superstitions to keep them away from his haunts, wherever they are. Officially he is just a farmer who has a little farm up in the hills, and he owns a fishing-boat too. But when he shows up there is a fight. Listen!”

A shrill clamor was rising from the square and Christine stood still, irresolutely. Mademoiselle spoke to her with quick annoyance. “You stay here at your own risk, Mademoiselle Tancrede! *Au revoir!*” And she went off.

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Christine hesitated. It was twilight and she was far from the castle, but she pulsated with curiosity. Mademoiselle Casenave was too cautious, really, too French bourgeoisie—even though she herself was childish to want to be running to a street fight. But she would peep, just once. She hurried toward the square. She was met by a gang of young men who came tumbling out from it, singing and shouting. On seeing the solitary girl, they stopped, and they began to make the sort of remarks that young men in gangs make to solitary girls. She turned back, endeavoring not to run. The noise eagerly followed. It promised to be unpleasant. She could almost feel a hot breath on her neck, and then a clear commanding voice cut through the drunken shouts. The feet pattered away, and there was silence. It was almost dark.

Christine started away at a quick pace, but not before she had heard the same voice tell her to be off and not mix in where she was not wanted. “I suppose you’re the first of the accursed tourists that will be coming in automobile trucks some day to stare at us!”

A friendly soul, she thought, this fellow in blue, for that it was he she was certain; she had seen him looming up in the half dark, tall, lean, wide-shouldered. But of course it was no wonder that smugglers didn’t like strangers around.

She had left the village when night fell completely and blackly on the earth. She was not afraid in the dark, but where was the road. She

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stumbled on, but the turning she expected wasn’t there. And there was no house, no light, only this utter darkness. She stopped to listen. Someone seemed to be coming from the village with light sandaled steps rapidly gaining on her. “*Addio!*” she said loudly, using the country greeting, and “*Addio*” a voice replied sullenly, but she could see no one in the blinding darkness. “Do you know the way to the Castle Gorostegui?” she asked and ran after the person who had already passed her.

He slowed up, kept pace with her. “Follow me,” the voice said curtly, and follow along she did, having almost to run, knowing no more of her companion than the light tap-tap of his sandals, though she felt sure she had only just heard that tone of vibrant, scornful command. She was not in the least frightened. She felt safely unimportant in the degree of his contempt. She rather enjoyed the little adventure. It seemed a pity they reached the

park so soon. There were lights in the windows at the end of the allée. She could find her way now.

With elaborate politeness she thanked the steps, but there was no answer. Oddly enough, they were following her now, and she found herself almost running. Then she collided with someone.

It was Catalin. She had just been going down the road to look for Mademoiselle. Madame was very uneasy about her. Madame had gone to

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Mademoiselle's room and found it empty. Yes, Madame was still there, waiting.

Christine made for her room, but not before she had heard that her unseen guide engaged Catalin in conversation. But as it was in Basque she understood nothing, only that Catalin spoke in the humble tone of a servant and the man with a master's peremptoriness. An extraordinary voice that man had. She found herself lingering to notice its low intensity. But Madame was waiting.

Madame de Gorostegui received her with a friendly scolding for the uneasiness she had given her. Didn't Miss Tancrede realize that it might not be safe to be out after dark? Oh, it was this American upbringing! What had she been doing so late in Arraldia? Had she made friends with anyone?

Christine, warmed by Madame's frank solicitude, told how she had met the school-teacher, about the procession, about all the interesting things the school-teacher had told her of the backwardness and superstitions of the Basques. She did not put it exactly that way, and she suppressed the part that related to the Gorosteguis and Madame, but Madame asked her point-blank if the school-teacher hadn't mentioned the absolutely medieval fear of witchcraft among the Basques.

Christine nodded, and the older woman sighed.

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"Oh, Miss Tancrede, who should know that better than I? My poor husband suffers from that very delusion. He has a persecution mania, and it takes that form. He thinks he is being bewitched, and by whom, if you please? By old Necato, his faithful nurse. And if it weren't she it would be somebody else. Never marry out of your class or your race, Miss Tancrede. You don't know what jungle you may get lost in!"

She played with her snake bracelet, then she continued, “And yet, shallow French rationalists like that teacher—by the way, I’m afraid I shall have to ask you not to see her—they make a mistake to despise all so-called superstition. An old alchemist said that gold would be made out of mercury; well, a modern scientist has done it. Oh, don’t smile—I’m trying for something more precious than gold.—Well, I’ve learned things even from Necato, who is superstitious enough to be a whole dark age by herself. And Necato knows of someone who has far more secrets than she has, someone who gathers his believers not far from here. He sent Catalin to me, but I have never been able to reach him. Now, you said, didn’t you, that this school-teacher had pointed out to you a certain smuggler, whom she called—the Devil?”

“No,” said Christine, immensely flattered by Madame’s confidential tone, “she said that some ignorant people called him that, and she doesn’t know he is a smuggler. I’m sure he is the very man who guided me here tonight when I lost

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my way, and I think he may still be outside talking to Catalin.”

Madame jumped up, black eyes afire in her ivory face. “I must go then. Keep all this to yourself. I’ll soon explain everything to you.”

In less than half an hour, just as the girl was about to go to bed, the Comtesse appeared again at the door, dressed to go out. Under her dark mantle there was a gleam of jewels and a rustle of silk. She explained that she had been called away for the night, and that as it was still early, Max absolutely refused to be left alone. Might she impose on Miss Tancrede just to sit in the room next to his until he fell asleep? “You know,” she smiled, “he is still a little boy afraid in the dark. And it is not so strange because my poor husband has a nervous attack now nearly every night and then he screams most alarmingly. Don’t let it worry you. Necato takes care of him.”

Christine, alert and pleased, immediately followed her. She was excited at the prospect of at last seeing the inside of the east tower, but it resembled the west tower in its big dark curving stairway going up past great doors that looked as if they had been shut for hundreds of years. The floor that corresponded to hers, however, had an occupied air, and the room they entered was soft and luxurious. Candles in beautifully wrought candelabra shed a mild yellow light on walls tapestried with books, exquisite Eastern rugs, low, broad, velvety seats.

"This is my library," the Comtesse said. "Soon I shall want you to help me put it in order. Max's room is in there—" she indicated a curtain. "I'll just tell him you'll stay."

She disappeared, and there were rapid murmurs, out of which the boy's shrill voice detached itself. "Did the Master *say* I couldn't come? Only you and Catalin and Corneille? The servants can go and I can't!"

Madame came out, serene and smiling, assuring the girl that Max would soon go to sleep, and she left with the happy, eager face of a young woman going to a ball. Soon there was the sound of wheels over cobble-stones.

Christine decided not to speculate on the mysterious behavior of Madame and the equally mysterious attraction of this smuggler. In good time, Madame meant to tell her.

The delicate gilding on the old books shone invitingly. But they were nearly all in dead languages, or at least in languages dead to Christine. However, she could see well enough that they were all on the subject that Lady Densham with a catch in her voice had used to describe as "occult." Perhaps that was what had started the witch-gossip about Madame amongst these mountain-marooned people. She started to draw out a French book with the alluring title *Tableau of the Inconstancy of Evil Angels*, when a voice from the other room piped up, "Miss Tancrede!"

Reluctantly she went in. But Max lay in a little

simple musliny bed, and he looked himself so small and white and wide-eyed that she forgot her dislike of him, until he opened his mouth and triumphantly declared: "Mamma didn't say you could look at the books!"

"But your mother said you were to go to sleep," she retorted. He began to wail, "I can't, I can't—I'm bo-red!"

She was sadly puzzled. She felt anything but drawn to this uncanny youngster. Still she had read of the infallible remedy for putting children to sleep. "I'll tell you a story," she beamed.

"Humph!" he grunted, and then, "Oh, very well," turning his face away and fiddling with a cupboard in the wall.

Christine felt chilled, especially as she couldn't for the life of her remember any story, except Cinderella, which seemed grotesquely inappropriate. Yet she began it, "Once upon a time—" How silly she felt,

but she toiled heroically on. "And on the very stroke of midnight," she was just saying, when she was startled to hear twelve tinkling little chimes from some hidden clock, and "Ugh" she screamed, for under her eyes, into her very face, Max had suddenly thrust something. She jumped to her feet and the thing fell back on the linen sheet.

It was a snake, a fat little loathly snake, coiling lazily about.

As if in answer to her cry, another came from the floor below, a long, sharp, terrified sound.

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"What's that!" she exclaimed, and Max, grinning and stroking the snake, said, "Oh, that's Necato playing with Pacheco."

"What do you mean, you little—" she fought hard for control, "put that nasty beast away!" The flickering lights, the darkness, the breathless silence almost overpowered her; she sensed the need for self-possession. And a cool, strong feeling did rise from the sources of her being.

"Put it away," she said calmly to the boy, and he yielded to the force in her voice, hastening to stick it back in the cupboard. She conquered a physical repulsion, took hold of his wrists, looked straight into his muddy, opaque eyes, "You are going to sleep now," she commanded steadily, and concentrated her entire will on conquering his. A few slow minutes passed, then his gaze began to waver, and she was almost frightened to see him jerk his head, become slightly rigid, and then lie relaxed in genuine sleep.

She tiptoed out, well aware that she must still on no account let go of herself. From below the same unearthly cries had recommenced, and she was coolly determined to find out about them. All this human anguish must surely have root in something besides mere nervousness. Softly, softly, she opened and closed the door to the hall, took off her shoes, and went cat-footed down the stairs.

The sounds were close. They came from behind the big door on the third landing. A ray of light from the large keyhole cleft the darkness

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there. Christine bent down, physically and spiritually, and looked through.

It was a high, vaulted room, candle-lit, hung with dark cloths, half shrouded in shadows, but she saw two persons. On a couch was the pale, wasted figure of Monsieur de Gorostegui, his face all stiff, staring eyes,

directed at Necato standing up in the middle of the room, but a hardly recognizable Necato.

The lower half of her thin body was swathed in vivid green silk, the upper half was naked, neither man nor woman, only a scrawny, leathery nakedness, and smeared with blood, as was her horrible bearded face.

Christine felt sick to see something move around her neck—it was a snake. On a low white marble table before her was a black cock with its head cut off, from which the blood spurted. In this Necato dipped her long spidery fingers, smeared herself in crosses and circles, and approached Gorostegui as if to smear him too. He screamed, and the girl nearly lost her balance. Necato recoiled and sneered, “I did not touch you, Pacheco, you know we could swear before the Master that we have never touched you. You scream too soon; we haven’t begun yet. You thought because she is not here that there would be no cock sacrificed, that he wouldn’t come. But there he is, there! there! See him; he smells the blood!”

Something stirred in the shadows at the back of the room. Christine felt her hair prickling on

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her head, yet it was only Madame’s little black dog that came forward, licking up the blood. But the sight seemed to throw Necato into ecstasy. She bowed deeply to the dog. She offered it the slaughtered cock, which it took and dragged back into the shadows.

“He is pleased,” she cried. “We can go on with the work, Pacheco; he is with us!”

From behind a hanging she produced a curious mannequin, like a big wax doll, yet much more clumsy. It was completely naked, mutilated, a sort of primitive figure of a man.

She put this upright on the stone table, then she drew a thin shining dagger from her girdle.

“You remember that we christened him Pacheco Gorostegui in the old chapel? He is you, yourself,” she said almost caressingly to the writhing man, “and now we will teach you not to run around, not to use your legs. Now we will cut once for Madame because you won’t die nicely and leave her a happy widow, and once for the poor gypsy whom you and your mother turned out of your farm!”

She drew the knife twice across the knees of the waxen figure, and a cry of pure pain came from the living man.

She made a movement towards the door, and Christine stood frozen to the spot, but the gypsy only took a burning candle from the candelabra by the door. Then she passed the flame slowly up and down and all around the image: "As the flame melts the wax, your flesh will melt away,

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your life will melt away," she chanted, and Pacheco Gorostegui seemed to fall into a faint.

Or was he dead? No, he was stirring again, but the girl could endure it no longer. She used her last vestige of self-control to escape unheard downstairs and back up to her room.

The rest of the night she spent in feverishly packing and repacking her things, one thought running through her mind: What have I been brought here for?

She remembered Necato's greedy clutch at her naked shoulder the day she had come. She thought of Max's pastime of torturing animals, his weird visit to her room at night, and the kind words of his mother, "Miss Tancrede is for me to play with," took on a new and sinister meaning-

Through her own incredible naïveté and lack of experience she had landed in a nest of viperish lunatics. God knows what "experiments" they might have destined her for! She felt slightly ashamed that she had let herself be even momentarily impressed by the rigmarole Necato had gone through, but she saw with lightning conviction that, rigmarole or not, it was killing Gorostegui just as surely as if they were stabbing him. This she could never have believed if she hadn't heard of the fanatic superstitions in this country. The lovely, picturesque procession had its reverse side. If they believed so militantly in God and the Saints, why wouldn't they believe

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equally in their counterparts, the Devil and his Witches? Working on that belief, Madame was certainly murdering her simple husband.

But was it Madame? The sober silver dawn brought cooler reflections to Christine. She had only seen Necato at work. Necato might well, out of her personal desire for vengeance, be doing this to Gorostegui. And Madame could very well set his words about it down to insane hallucinations. Hadn't she warned her about it that very evening?

Clearly she ought to tell Madame. And yet—there were signs that she and Catalin were in league with this imperious, half-seen stranger whom they referred to as the “Master.” Whom Necato had mentioned too. There was no knowing what hornet’s nest that was, quite apart from the Gorostegui affair.

Poor Pacheco. He had seemed rather ox-like and unsympathetic to her, but now he was pitifully weak. Must he be tortured to death by that old witch? He would be, if she ran away. But what could she do for him? Mademoiselle Casenave? She could only tell either the doctor or the police, and how could anything be proved? The insanity theory would be believed by the French and Pacheco would be no better off.

The curé? She could not imagine speaking to him and she could not see what he could do in this case.

She had heard somewhere about the power of superstition even in our day, in New York, London,

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Paris—yes, it was from Richard Holmody, that night at the hotel, after the affair of the diamond pin.

He was the man. He knew both the Gorosteguis; she had noticed that he was friendly with Monsieur. She would write him to the address of his newspaper in Paris, and ask him to come down immediately as his friends were in trouble. She would say nothing more, then explanations could follow.

But he must be warned not to tell that she had written.

He came. Within four days. Christine knew beforehand that he was coming because a telegram had arrived and thrown the castle into confusion. It was changed from a mournful ruin into a living thing. Relatives of Catalin appeared, dusting, brushing, opening up the vast dead rooms. Christine found Madame in one of them, crashing splendid chords out of a grand piano and making wry faces at it.

“It’s not in tune—Oh, Miss Tancrede, you remember Mr. Holmody whom you met with me in Biarritz? He and his newly-discovered aunt are coming. He just wired me that as there is trouble in Spain and he ought to go there for his paper, he will stop off here first.

“And—of course you won’t mention my family troubles. Max tells me that you were a little frightened the other night when my poor husband was

moaning—?”

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Madame was smiling so winningly, she was so easy and straightforward, that Christine's ears grew hot. Perhaps she had made a fool of herself. Perhaps Madame really knew nothing.

“Necato—” she began haltingly, and was cut off.

“Necato is not good for him; I'm beginning to realize that. Much as I dislike to, I may have to send him away. Oh, and one other thing. Did Max behave?”

“He seems to have a pet snake—”

“The wretch! It's mine; he's not supposed to touch it. I was keeping a pair in my laboratory, to see them shuffle off their skin, you know—if we could only do that!”

“You're not afraid?”

“You ought to be careful because the mountains are full of them here, but they don't bite me. I can handle snakes as some people can handle bees. But with the poisonous kinds I have to fix my whole mind on them; it's not easy. So don't you leave the roads!”

Christine assured her sincerely that she wouldn't. After all, she had read of people in the East having snakes for pets.

Had she been melodramatically alarmist about Madame? Then what on earth would she say when Richard Holmody came? She grew hot and cold all over.

He came. There was dinner in the hall that night. Trunks of trees blazed in the vast carved

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chimney, and hosts of little candles shed their mild light on the roses, the silver, the white linen, the red and yellow wines. Christine wore her one low-cut dress, but it was black and set off her fair skin and pale shining hair. Madame came in, like a fourteenth century chatelaine in an odd flowing thing of violet velvet. And the pink, informal plumpness of Mrs. Watts was barely covered by a pale-blue sequined frock. As she had her hair cut she looked like an enormous elderly baby, and to be thoroughly in character she gurgled about, “This lovely old medieval place. It must be haunted. Oh, do tell me it's haunted!”

Madame regretted infinitely that she had bought a ghostless chateau, and Richard Holmody had a worried expression. He began to talk himself, as if to change the subject, and Christine forgot her anxieties in watching him. He wasn't trying for effect, he was simple and vivid, eager and interested. He created the human comedy in a few stories. And yet he didn't want a monologue. He sent the conversation several times to Madame, even to his aunt, often to Christine; but while the other two contented themselves with smiling, the girl found herself answering him, making him laugh. Buoyed by his questions, she discovered that she was at the end of a long description of life in the Densham cottage, a description that not only made him laugh but look at her with a new expression.

But Mrs. Watts in the sweetest way pointed out that we must not be uncharitable. With large

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fat gestures she included Lady Densham and English county society in the all-good, and she vouched generously for their good intentions. She explained that in people like Lady Densham, and even in the lady who had falsely accused our little friend here of theft, we must look only for the good; if we did we should find it. As for the evil, that was only an illusion, a temporary error, which we could help the victims overcome by not believing in it. As for being dreary, weren't we all dreary to somebody?

She threw back her head and smiled; it was as if a piece of sticky fly-paper had been drawn across the conversation. Christine and Richard Holmody looked intently at their plates, Madame de Gorostegui sat with a sober, far-away expression. It was a distinct relief that Catalin came in and whispered something to the hostess, who rose at once, excusing herself, "My little boy, you know, is not very well—"

Mrs. Watts was desolate, first that she hadn't been told the countess was a mother, secondly that nobody had let her know the dear little child was ill. She wanted to go to its bedside at once, and Richard stopped her with great difficulty. They continued dinner to the accompaniment of Mrs. Watts' frequent sighs, and no sooner had they finished than she rose and announced that she was going to her room, "because I think I might be able to help." She was out of the room while Christine was saying that she felt certain the comtesse would never want

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anybody to come—but Richard Holmody explained that Mrs. Watts meant going to her own room to assist in spirit, by prayer. The girl looked puzzled and he laughed.

“My aunt is really good-hearted. If only she’d keep still about it,” and he shrugged his shoulders.

Christine realized with a sudden strong heartbeat that they were alone. Her hands were cold and her face hot. Now, now, he was going to ask her what she meant by that letter. His voice already had a lower, more intimate sound, and he was looking at her in a curious way. Oh, God, what would she say!

But instead of the dreaded question, he went on talking about his aunt and the “psychic,” about all the silly credulities of this world. And Christine smiled appreciatively, yet she kept thinking she would soon have to tell him that Pacheco Gorostegui was being killed not by poison, dagger or bullet, but by wicked will-power, by mind on mind. But he went on from fortune-telling to ectoplasm, from ectoplasm to spirit-photographs, and gradually she began to hope that he had never got the letter. He might just as well have come on his own account. She drew a deep breath, and began to dare to look at him, his figure that was beginning to thicken, his eager mobile face, his nose that seemed to have been broken and not altogether perfectly reset. It endeared him to her, this slightly imperfect nose. Also the fact, hardly noticed by her before,

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that he wore glasses, old-fashioned pincenez. Any detail that subtracted from his conventional perfection seemed to her a boon, to make him more attainable. She felt quite at her ease now, he spoke so naturally, she was able to answer, to banter back and forth, and then he said, totally *mal à propos*, and turning his head towards the fire:

“I got your letter.”

It is often easier to deal with the unexpected, and Christine, thrown into the water, began to swim. Not without hesitation and bread-crumbling and averted eyes, yet she spoke:

“I wrote you because you are the only person I know who knows my—employers here. And I am worried, because, well, because—” if only he would look at her, but he kept turning his head away, “well, I am worried about Monsieur de Gorostegui, I can’t somehow tell you why. Of course it’s none of my business—but if you would only go and see him, then—”

“But Gorostegui is not here!” Richard Holmody interrupted her with amazement. “He isn’t here. Madame has just told me that as his mental condition was worse, and as she suspected it was being made worse by his nurse and the whole gloomy place here, he had been taken to a sort of nursing home, not far from Pau. You didn’t know?”

“No, I—didn’t,” Christine spoke lamely, struck by a paralyzing fear. Had Necato finished with her victim? Or was it true? Had

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Madame in all good faith sent him somewhere to be cured? She had mentioned the possibility. And he could very well have been taken away at night.

“You must excuse me, then, for having been such a busybody and so impertinent as to write you,” she murmured, making an effort to control herself.

“Impertinent!” He was brusque. “I was glad to come—very glad,” he added, smiling.

She said good-night, and he shook hands with her, as if to seal a compact.

In her room, unable and unwilling to go to sleep, she wondered whether he too had felt the little startling vibration that had thrilled up her arm. She tried to analyze the tone in his voice when he said he was glad to have come. She thought with a sudden pain that he was really quite old, over thirty, probably, and that of course there must be some other woman. The fact, at first bright, that he was unmarried, rapidly became ominous. He must be devoted to some married woman. Madame de Gorostegui? Impossible; she was too old, and they were perfectly impersonal with each other. And anyway, what did she care?

She didn’t want to marry him, or anybody, not she! The very idea of marriage took all the glamor out of the whole thing. Marriage, diapers and dishcloths were shunted together out of her aerial mind. She wanted—well, now that she was grown-up, she wanted to stop having imaginary

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love affairs. And he was the first man she had met, whom she could imagine—

Suppose it didn’t last, what of that! Women had too few experiences. Ninon de l’Enclos was her real heroine. Suppose he ever should want to

marry her? She would then have to explain to him—it would be painful, but she would be firm—and—she went to sleep, lost in acting out this delicious scene.

CHAPTER SIX

RICHARD HOLMODY stood at his window in the deepening dark and wondered at himself. He had stayed longer at the castle than he intended. The days had been slipping past, ensnaring him. Days that belied December, crisp, pale, golden. Fields dyed in pure emerald green, and the hills in rusty red.

Lydia had fairly forced him to go for walks with that girl. She excused herself because Max was ailing, and his aunt was so busy writing a long poem on the beauty of the country that she had no time to go out and look at it. Not that he minded! The trouble in Spain could wait. There would always be trouble in Spain.

He and the girl had talked a great deal. The queer thing was that she could talk. She had read so much that sometimes he quite forgot her age and inexperience and seriously compared ideas and expressions with her. Perhaps it was because her mind hadn't been fixed in any mold of education or society that she was so fresh, so keen, so honest.

And so naïve!

Or was it naïveté? He could hardly be sure. This afternoon, for instance.

They had seen a country wedding parade past them, tripping behind flutes and drums, and Christine had quite deliberately taken that chance to declare her distaste for marriage. Past brooks, ravines, wooded hills, groves of madly

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gnarled oaktrees, she had held forth on the sad tying-up of priceless liberty that marriage entailed. Now, Ninon de l'Enclos—

As if aware that a girl of her age might not be taken wholly seriously on this topic, she had fixed him severely with her candid gray eyes, but there had been not a twinkle in his, not a smile on his lips.

Why should he smile? If he believed in anything it was in recognizing sincerity and treating it with respect. But he had to admit that he wanted intensely to believe that she was sincere, and that even at her age she had a right to choose for herself. There had been a certain trouble under his calm surface. Perhaps it was the south wind that was beginning to blow again,

light, insidious, disturbing. The mountain he had seen at sunset was glowing orange above, moist blue below, the night would be stormy.

Well, and suppose she did let him know in that lovely, pure, frank way that she could approve of brief idyls?

Brief idyls was all he could allow himself. He had had his grande passion—if there was anything settled for him it was that he would be loyal to it. Loyalty was his only justification for living. He dwelt hard on that idea.

Richard Holmody, in spite of his easy metropolitan air, lived a very austere life with himself, though for reasons he did not quite fathom. He had been brought up to believe that illegitimate love was sin, and while he had long ago

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shuffled off the religious wrappings the conviction still remained in him that only disgusting brutes made light love where they legally should not. And so, when he was charmed by a married woman, he had had to believe that so far from being a light affair, it was the great affair of his life, wholly purified and justified by his sincere and eternal love. Even if she finally dismissed him, as she did, with sage and noble phrases, he had to remain faithful forever. Or what had it all been? No, there could never be another woman he wanted to marry. He felt that his heart was burned out.

Still, he was not ascetic. How could he help responding to youth so quaint and surprising as Christine's? And youth with shining eyes, shimmering hair—and such white shoulders.

It was oppressively warm. He opened the window and listened to the billowy, roaring, all-enveloping sound of the fierce black storm that had risen from the south. He felt agitated, it was immorally hot and violent. All the trees in the park were bending, swishing, creaking, fairly dancing where they stood, large whirling masses in the dark.

Had she meant to convey anything to him that afternoon?

Or was he deceived by this raving wind? Was he imagining now that the door had clicked open? He swung round. Hardly believing his eyes he saw a little whiteness standing there, heard a timid voice, "Mr. Holmody?"

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He lost his head. In a few strides he had reached her, his hands slipped from her shoulders to her waist, he kissed her long and breathlessly. He

held her so hard, so convulsively that she gave a little cry of pain, and, suddenly sobered, he let her go.

And, “Oh, Richard,” she panted, “don’t think of me, but go at once to the east tower—I heard someone crying out there—Perhaps Max is worse—perhaps—!”

As if grasping at a chance, he fled, saying only, “Wait!”

Christine sank down on a chair, swept by a flood of stormy happiness. The miracle had suddenly happened. He did care, and care enough to go where she asked him to, even at that moment. It was hard that she had to send him away. She tried to listen against the roaring of the wind.

Catalin had come to her a few minutes ago, shaken out of her reserve, saying there were sounds in the east tower that weren’t right, sounds that Mademoiselle or somebody ought to investigate at once.

And Christine not daring to go herself had thought of Richard. Her knees like water, she had gone to his door.

If he’d only come back soon—this night was like a thousand demons. She touched his coat on the back of the chair.

There! She heard him. “Oh, what did you find?”

“Nothing!” He kept standing at the door, “I

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only managed to disturb Madame de Gorostegui, and she assured me that if I had heard anything it was Max stepping on the tail of a cat or dog or something. I heard nothing and saw nothing—Why, were you frightened?”

“Yes, no—well, it was one of the servants who begged me to go up there, she thought—she seemed upset—but I thought you could do it better than I—Richard!”

It was like a cry, and instantly he was on his knees before her, hiding his face in her lap, his body shaking as if he were sobbing. And she dared to run her fingers through his hair, to bend down and kiss the back of his neck, to call him little names.

And the poor man raised his head and said, “Forgive me!”

Her trembling smile was lost in the dark, “Forgive you, Richard! When I loved you all the time!”

Why did he draw away so brusquely, though he was still there, still speaking, his voice full of tenderness.

“Forgive me, my poor little Christine, you must forgive me, I couldn’t help kissing you—you were so suddenly there, and I had been thinking

about you—it was that storm too—”

“But, my dearest Richard,” her voice thrilled with emotion, “I liked you to kiss me—when we love each other?”

He jumped to his feet and began pacing the room, “O God! my dear little girl. You can’t

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help it. You are the most lovable human being on earth—but—I don’t love you!”

“You—don’t—” it was as if the fire in her veins were changing to ice.

He took her cold hands. “I owe it to you to be honest!—You said to-day, and God knows if you knew what you were saying, but you told me you hated the idea of marriage. Well—I—the idea of marriage is impossible for me too. I can love no one—that way.”

The night closed in about her, “But, yes, I meant what I said—but I just want to know, why couldn’t you love me as if it were for—marriage?”

He tightened his grip of her hands. “Because I love someone else.”

Christine jerked herself away, “Madame de Gorostegui?”

He went over to the window, saying nothing. She told herself that she must not speak, that if she said a word against her, he would put it down to jealousy. And yet she had to speak. “If you knew the things that go on in this house—Monsieur was being tortured by that horrible monster Necato, and Max is a viper, and there is a mysterious man—oh, I’m mad to talk about it!”

Again he put his arms around her, again she felt his lips, but lightly, gently, as if to quiet a child. He sat down with her. “You must listen to me,” he said gravely, “while I tell you something

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about the people here. You misunderstand her. She has suffered a great deal, but it has not made her hard. She took you away from that Englishwoman because she wanted to help you.—Her life with Gorostegui is a tragedy. How much can I tell you? Before she married him she was the wife of a rich London businessman, a drunkard, a brute, money and nothing else. Till she met me she had never had a soul she could talk to. It’s long ago. I was a poor reporter. But poor as I was she would have run away with me, only she could not bear to have our happiness based on his unhappiness. So we separated, oh, several years ago, it was hard for me—”

Christine unconsciously gripped his hand consolingly, “but I dare say she was right. I suffered so then, that now I can’t really feel anything.

“Well, he died, and I accepted her decision that we should continue as friends. She thought I was too young to be what she called tied to her. She is too generous.

“When she met this Basque and he threatened to shoot himself if she wouldn’t marry him, she did. And I think too she did it because she thought in that way I would feel free to marry somebody else.” She did everything for Gorostegui, got him a title, he’s a vain man, bought him this castle, tried to educate him—but nothing can be done for him. He has a sort of periodic madness, the doctors say there is no hope. And yet she buried

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herself here with him! As for Max—I know about him; he’s certainly a morbid boy, and it’s her great grief.”

“He’s *wicked!*” Christine interrupted with all the emphasis she could muster.

“Wicked? He is ill—pathological. My dear Christine, I have met all sorts of people and I don’t believe in wickedness. Not that I’d drag out the ‘All-Good’ but I don’t believe in original sin. Max happens to be born without a moral sense the way some people are born color-blind—that doesn’t make him any less of a horrid little nuisance, but it ought to make us more charitable.”

“Mrs. Watts would say so too,” Christine remarked with the ghost of a giggle. She couldn’t feel tragic when his arm was so sincerely around her waist. Say what he would, the fact of their being there together seemed to her to contradict all his words. But he went on, seriously, “As for this Necato, why don’t you just tell Lydia—Madame de Gorostegui—what you think of her? If you don’t want to, I could write her a letter—”

“A letter?”

“Yes, I leave to-morrow morning before anyone is up.”

The girl drew her breath sharply, “You needn’t leave for my sake. I—meant all that I said about not caring for marriage.”

“But I do care for you, even though I have been a fool to-night. I am not—wicked! You

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have a right to something better than a man who can’t really love anybody.”

“I don’t care, I don’t care,” she clung to him, not meaning at all that she didn’t care, but thinking that if she could but gain time she could persuade him that he did love her. She willed desperately to get him to stay, but it was as if emotion had taken the steel out of her, leaving her soft and helpless.

In apathetic misery she let him bring her back to her tower, the storm covering creaking stairs and grating doors, the black night hiding the two little figures that leaned an instant against each other before she went up. But he did not kiss her. She begged for it as if for alms, yet he turned and was gone in the darkness.

So she lay down with a sense of burning shame, which she eagerly tried to think was hate. Oh, if she could only hate him for having refused her!

In the morning she too ought to go away, anywhere, away! Never to see her rival again. Her rival! She laughed sharply to think of the yellow, prow-like face of Madame de Gorostegui. He couldn’t love that! Unless indeed he were bewitched. Oh, “Lydia” had power, and she could be fascinating, hadn’t she fascinated her once? But for a man like Richard really to love her, no, that was impossible. She would *not* go away. She would stay and study her, carefully, cleverly, with the most innocent face. All was not so simple as Richard’s explanations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT had rained half of January, all of February and it was raining now in the middle of March. Christine, sitting on a low stool in front of the fire in Madame's library, raised her eyes from her embroidery and saw the rain still falling in steady gray streaks. Real Pyrenean rain doesn't bother to split into drops. For all these weeks the castle had been cut off from the world by a wet, streaming wall, but Christine thought the air had been purged of its tension by it.

She looked quietly around. Here she sat in this soft, rich, exquisite room, before a flickering fire, and there by the window Max played quietly with something, and here on the other side of the fire sat Madame absorbed in a huge old folio, wearing spectacles on her curving nose, for all the world like a pleasant elderly lady.

The girl smiled, she enjoyed this idea. She enjoyed the rain too, it was so muffling, so soothing, it was putting out the biting, burning pain in her heart. Numbness was delicious. The first weeks after the morning when he had gone away had been pure torture. She felt she had to see, to be near Madame, as the wounded has to pick his wound.

And Madame, though utterly unconscious of what had happened, seemed to want her company, had complained of Christine's pale thinness, had wanted to bring her back to her former

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rosy health. She was moved from her little room into the east tower, was given a much more comfortable place, and an entirely different life commenced for her.

Monsieur de Gorostegui was not there. Madame told her he was still in the nursing home near Pau. She told her too that Necato had become too queer to have around and had been provided for in her home village.

In the beginning, during those moments of dizzy hatred that sometimes overwhelmed her, Christine believed that Madame was lying, she believed her to be fiendish, something diabolic that had strangely entangled Richard and cruelly murdered Monsieur. But at other times her spirit almost groveled before this woman who suddenly seemed invested with almost superhuman qualities of charm, ease, self-sacrificing goodness, even of

beauty. At those times she nearly threw herself at her feet to tell her humbly about her love and to beg Richard from her. She needed so desperately to tell somebody. The ceaseless waters separated her from the village and Mademoiselle Casenave, and in any case she couldn't somehow imagine her as confidante. She had been very stiff the time she introduced Richard to her.

She would almost have talked to Catalin, but Catalin had gone back into her original sulky silence, after a few cryptic remarks to the effect that she supposed Mademoiselle was here to help Madame, and that the "Master" would hardly approve, but she intended to keep her mouth

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shut and not mix into the affairs of her betters. But Christine rarely saw Catalin alone, she had her meals now with Madame in a white-and-gold dining-room.

All the rooms had been transformed. Rugs and tapestries and furniture had been brought that concealed the grimness of the thick walls and rugged floor. In the boudoir of Madame, Christine saw silks and silver and luxuries such as she had never dreamed of. It dawned on her that to bewitch a poor young man no more arts were needed than these, and then the pathetic fact that the mistress of it all was unhappy and turning to him for consolation.

A sharp pang went through the heart on whose numbness she had been priding herself, she remembered the bitter fact that he had never even written. During the first weeks she waited outside in the cascading rain for the postman, but in vain. And still, in the inmost clear cold recess of her soul she knew that she savored her misery.

As for Lady Densham, she might have regretted that dull, comfortable life at the fantastic beginning of her stay in the Chateau, but not now. No, everything was going smoothly now. If it hadn't been for Richard she might even have been peacefully contented.

Madame was simple, easy, friendly, and Max was well under control. He read all the time or solved mathematical puzzles or played chess with himself and an imaginary opponent, as he was doing at this very moment. The eerie little black

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dog appeared to be hibernating, he slept all day curled up in a corner on a green pillow.

During the mornings Christine's work was to catalogue the library and to copy out all the references she could find to the subjects the Comtesse said she was studying. Plants, for instance, their healing virtues and under what moon and stars they must be cut to be efficacious.

It was amusing. She enjoyed the quaint language, the Latin names, the fairy-tale charm. In her best round upright hand, she wrote: "Under the new moon must be gathered *Thymus majorana*, *Helleborus niger*, *Ruta graveolens*, and they are sovereign remedies against insanity, nervous diseases, and hysteria."

And for the heart, was there nothing for the heart? Yes:

"Under the rising sun must be gathered *Rosmarinus*, *Lavendula*, *Salvia*, *Melissa*—good for diseases of the heart and for rheumatism."

If only the rain would stop so that she could go out under the rising sun and gather *Melissa* for the heart. And for the rheumatism which one would catch at the same time!

The light was getting dimmer, she moved her stool a bit nearer to the window. There she heard an odd buzzing sound. Max had stopped playing chess and was doing something else. She looked. Ugh—he was taking flies out of a bottle and slowly tearing the wings off them.

She jumped up, "Oh, Madame!" and pointed to the boy.

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Madame saw the situation at once, she took the bottle from the boy, opened the window and threw it out. It tinkled on the cobble-stones below.

Then she shook the pale, little, oldish imp. "Horrible mess, Max, off to bed with you," and she hurried him out.

Returning, she said that while she could understand cruelty in the interests of science, she hated useless torture and her thin lips curved in real disgust. Then she sighed and went back to her book. Soon she dropped it and bent forward: "Miss Tancrede! You're not still trying to embroider in this darkness? You mustn't! Catalin will bring the lamps soon. Oh, what eyesight! Oh, Youth!—Miss Tancrede, do you really understand how marvelous it is to be young?"

"No," Christine was surprised into candor by the unusual personal note in the voice. "No, I really think it's miserable to be young. One is so—" she hesitated, then blurted out, "unhappy."

She could hardly see Madame now in the thickening twilight, but from the corner she spoke more softly and intimately than she had ever done.

“You think because you’re poor that you’re unhappy—you haven’t the kind of clothes you like, you’re obliged to work for your living, but you’re still young! You still have a chance. Your blood is fresh and quick and red in your body, your eyes are bright—no nasty little cobweb wrinkles around them—your skin is white and

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your hair is yellow. Look at me! My skin is yellow and my hair is nearly white. It’s very different! What good is it to me that my first husband left me a fortune and my second has given me a title—when I’m no longer young?

“Miss Tancrede”—a velvet touch skimmed the girl’s hand and the voice in the dark was deeply pleading—“Miss Tancrede, you who are so rich, you ought to have pity on me who am so poor!”

“Oh, Madame!” Christine was both touched and puzzled.

“I was cheated of all my youth. You know London? I was born in Whitechapel—if you don’t know it I will tell you that it is filth and hunger and misery inconceivable. I was *poor*. My family hated me because I was different from them, and because I wanted to escape. I ran away when I was fourteen, I found work in a factory, and there I stayed. Ah, you have never worked in a factory. You don’t know what it is to be walled into a tomb, a noisy tomb with thundering machinery and wretched dirty companions while you are in the very first flush of youth. I developed early. I was rounded and fresh-colored and black-eyed and black-haired, and I had to waste it in that tomb. I hated the slaves who worked with me.

“There was nothing in my whole life to console me except one little patch of sunlight, one seal of golden whiteness, that shone on the dirty gray wall about the middle of the afternoon. I lived for that radiance. It was like hope to me,

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like a promise that I too should get out in the sunlight.

“And I did. I was able to buy clothes with my savings, able to get a position in the fashionable part of town. But I discovered that this was worse. To see the pretty things and not be able to have them. You oughtn’t to blame me if I found a rich man and got him to marry me. Max’s father. But I thank my stars that the boy has intelligence and will. His father was a

dull lump of money-making flesh. Dull! Oh, I couldn't make you understand.! And I found that money wasn't enough."

"Now, now," Christine shivered to herself. "she is coming to Richard." But she didn't.

"Money was not enough. He knew nobody. He was oldish and gloomy. When he died, there I was with the money, but my youth was gone. In lamplight I could fool myself, but not in the clear morning. Well, then I left England. I traveled. In the Pyrenees I met Gorostegui. How can I explain to you? He was so young, so strong, so splendidly young that I—well—I felt he could somehow rejuvenate me. I thought too that a title would be an aid to the kind of society I needed to be in.

"I am being frank with you, terribly frank."

"Of course she isn't obliged to tell me that she bought the title," the girl thought.

"But I must be frank, so you will help me. Gorostegui has, as you know, developed a mental

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weakness. They write me that he may die. I am not going to pretend grief to you. That marriage was an impetuous folly. If he dies—he dies. But what good is this title and this fortune to me?" Her voice had risen into a shrill wail, then she paused.

"You could—travel," Christine suggested lamely. The other laughed.

"But, I have just told you my whole life. You see, you must be able to see, that I have been cheated of the best thing in life—youth."

"What can I—" the girl began, then she remembered a newspaper article, "I read something about operations, animal glands—"

"Horrors!" Madame fairly spat. "Could you imagine human beings willing to have loathsome animal things put into their own bodies? Why even vaccines are dangerous, may corrupt the blood. But I have discovered another way. I don't believe in what the dear old ladies call the occult, except in so far as some things are 'hidden' from the stupid. I told you that I have learned things even from Necato, just as I have learned things from those old books you think so nonsensical."

Christine made a vague, polite murmur; she was tense as to what that even honeyed voice coming out of the dark was going to say next.

"Oh, you do think them nonsensical. I may not be able to read your thoughts, but I can read that quiet little smile at the corner of your

pretty lips. You have such red—young Ups. Now, try to control your skepticism. I have found the secret of—rejuvenation!”

“What is it?” Christine was rather shaky. She was ready to believe that Madame too was mad. If Catalin would only come with the lamp—the room was no longer a room, but black, thick, infinite night, and nothing in the vastness except herself and this throaty, wheedling voice.

“If I can help you, of course I will,” she added hastily, and Madame continued:

“There is nothing ‘occult’ or superstitious about it, it is purely scientific—chemical. First I have to make what the Rosicrucians used to call the ‘Alcahest.’ Nothing strange about that—I take lime, I powder it, I put it into a retort, I pour alcohol on it, I distil it, I do that ten times. I mix it with some pure carbonate of potash, I put in fresh leaves gathered under the new moon of the plant Melissa, I distil it again—”

“Oh, yes,” the girl said nervously, “Melissa for the heart!”

“And for other things too,—well, and then at last the powder of the Alcahest is made. And then—”

The girl started—two smooth, strong, hot hands sought and found hers, and the cajoling voice was close to her ear:

“And then I need something to mix with the Alcahest, I must have it, my whole life depends on it—you must give me some of your blood.”

All Christine’s self-control snapped, she tried

to jerk away, she cried, “Oh, you want to kill me! You know I love Richard, you want to get rid of me!”

But the hands held her inexorably fast. “Silly girl! I have had a glimpse of a man in these hills who is infinitely his superior. As far as I’m concerned, you can have your Richard, no, you shall have him, afterwards, as your reward. I don’t want to kill you, you saved Max from the dog for me, and furthermore it isn’t necessary. To make this liquid, this *primum ens sanguinis*, I have to have a healthy, young, pure, beautiful girl, and you are that, and I must have my retort full of your blood, but it needn’t kill you. People are sometimes bled for the sake of their health! Be sensible!”

If she could only be calm now she could deal with this madwoman, and Christine dove down below her tension and her fright and, with a

superhuman effort, brought up outward tranquillity. She abandoned her hands to the other, she said almost listlessly, "Forgive my violence, Madame. You can see that it was jealousy, but now that I see that you don't care—"

"Of course I don't care for him—a little flirtation long ago when I was bored with my awful husband—and you will be sensible?"

"I have promised to help you and I will," Christine lied steadfastly.

"That's my brave girl! No, it doesn't have to be straight away. In fact it mustn't be until the first new moon in April, if it's to be done

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well. Oh, it can't be for a week or ten days. All you have to do is to eat well and sleep long, and to do nothing. Don't even think about it. We shan't mention it until then.—Here comes Catalin with the lamps. I told her to be late with them this evening. I meant to speak to you."

Here indeed came Catalin, like a goddess of light.

In the middle of that night, Christine tiptoed around her room with a little package of those of her possessions she thought she could carry with her. She had to be in the dark. She meant to go to Mademoiselle Casenave, beg shelter until morning and then away to Paris. Perhaps Richard would believe her now—if she dared tell him. In any case, she was through here. Icy sensations poured down her back at the thought of what she had been listening to. However, later on she could be frightened to her heart's content. The present was no time.

All the lights in the castle were extinguished and the night was dark with a little chill wind blowing. If only it had been a storm! But such as the night was she had to profit by it, not another day would she spend under this roof.

She anointed the hinges of the door liberally with cold-cream, and it opened without a sound. Holding her breath, and fearing the noise of her beating heart, she proceeded with infinite softness down the stairs. Cr-ea-k went a step, and she stopped, choking, aghast. Three or four times it

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happened and each time she expected something to clutch her from behind. But she arrived at the great nail-studded door. She could reach only one

hinge to grease it, then she tried the handle. The door was locked! Ordinarily it never was.

“Steady now,” she told herself as her legs began to quiver, and she remembered that there were cellars under the castle, old dungeons which she had never visited for fear of rats. Back in the hall the door opened down to them, and once there a window might be found, anything.

By sliding her fingers along the wall, she found the little door, and it yielded. A cold dank breath came from the stairs, something soft and heavy scurried across her foot, but at last she reached a stone-flagged corridor. She fumbled along it for doors or windows, then she stopped, cold to the marrow.

Someone was moaning, close by.

A feeling half of nausea, half of ice sliding under her scalp overcame her. It was as if the blood stilled in her veins and her breath refused to come. She could hear words—a prayer—Virgin of Lourdes, Virgin of Guadeloupe, Virgin of Pilar—it was Pacheco de Gorostegui’s voice. It was human!

She had lied, then, Madame. A nursing home indeed. But Necato? A new terror struck the girl. Undoubtedly she must be around; undoubtedly she had gone up to consult her mistress and had left the door to the dungeons open—undoubtedly she would return, if she were not already

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here, lurking somewhere among the rats, waiting for her.

She began to fumble her way again, away from the waning murmured prayer. At the end of the corridor there was a grating through which she could hear the wind, feel the fresh night air. Two of the bars had fallen out, and she swung herself to the sill. One more effort, and she was out—out in the bottom of a dried moat. She knew it well, she could easily scramble up its grassy sides.

She listened, there was no sound except the wind yet she had a distinct feeling she was being followed. “Nerves,” she told herself and climbed up the moat. Now, slowly for three minutes across the cobble-stones, and then she would run through the park like the wind.

“Ai-i!” she cried, beside herself with fear, as something cold and wet thrust itself against her hand. But it was only Sultan, the big woolly shepherd-dog whom she had once saved from Max’s poker. It never barked

at her, it didn't now, only kept close to her, rubbing against her dress affectionately.

Had somebody heard her? She hurried across the court-yard, happy to have Sultan, yet with the uneasy feeling that there was a shape more solid than the night somewhere behind her. At the outer gate, she was certain she heard steps.

A wild panic winged her feet, she fled down the long avenue of ghostly plantain trees and the dog galloped with her.

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Horribly, unmistakably, someone was running behind her, gaining, gaining, soft padded footfalls.

The dog in his excitement at this new game was beginning to bark, and she could no longer hear whether the pursuer was coming up. Nor did she dare to turn and look, although a pale gray moonlight was filtering through the clouds now. Unused to this kind of sprint, she began to choke for breath and sharp pains stabbed her side.

At the park gates she stumbled and fell. Immediately a long thin figure towered over her. In the moon twilight she recognized Necato.

Immobilized by terror she neither uttered a sound nor moved, but the dog as if sensing her danger leaped for the throat of the woman. Instantly a long knife flashed and plunged. Sultan tumbled backwards with a howl, and lay still.

The girl lost consciousness.

She came to in a small white empty room. There were bars in front of the high narrow window and she tried to drag the couch under it to discover where she was. Perhaps it might all be a nightmare, beginning with the story the Comtesse had told her in the dark. But the couch was fastened to the floor. She sat down on it quickly, holding her breath—a key was being turned in the lock. She was not afraid now, a sort of icy self-possession had succeeded to her panic. She didn't flinch when the door opened and Necato came in, big, swarthy, bearded, man-woman face,

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small savage eyes. She motioned Christine to follow her. Across the hall a door was open towards which the creature pointed.

The girl went in, head high, hands clinched. It was a large shadowy room, full of odd glasses, bottles, instruments, a furnace in a corner, evidently the laboratory. Madame de Gorostegui was there, holding a retort with a red fluid up to the pale daylight. When Christine had stood in the middle of the room a couple of minutes, she turned.

“Well, Miss Tancrede, sit down, there’s a chair behind you. You must be tired—” she was almost dulcet, but a little sharpness edged in as she continued, “We are all tired because of this capricious night-walking of yours.”

“I had a right to leave!”

“Oh, yes! But for a young woman with noble relatives, don’t you think you left a little queerly? As if you were making off with the silver? Oh, I know you didn’t, we found your little package, but you won’t need it. We shall have to keep you under lock and key for a while.”

She paced up and down the room, looking yellow and furrowed. Christine for very weariness had sat down. Madame paused in front of her.

“You have put me in a very difficult position, Miss Tancrede. I thought you had character. You, tacitly at least, encouraged me to tell you all about myself, my despairs, my hopes—you

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feigned sympathy and you promised to help me. You lied! Oh, don’t grimace; the fact is that you lied to me. If it hadn’t been for this ugly but faithful Necato, I could have whistled for you to keep your promise. Oh, I should have reached you in some way; you may be a stubborn little thing, but I am stronger, as you would have found out, even if you had succeeded in leaving us so impolitely.

“But here you are, and my difficulty is that everything is changed now that I know you have no good-will. You were here at the castle, completely available for me to do with as I pleased without asking your or anybody’s permission. If you had disappeared, who would have known? Yet, out of pure goodness and gratitude to you for having once saved my boy, I decided to appeal to your intelligence, your sympathy, your spirit of cooperation.

“You have failed me. I know now that if I carry out my experiment and you—to put it frankly—survive it, you will make for the nearest gendarmerie.

“And then, another thing. Since you’ve been here, you’ve been much too nosey about Monsieur de Gorostegui. I half suspect you told your friend in the village about our private affairs?”

“No!” Christine burst out involuntarily.

“Well, that shows some delicacy on your part, and we shan’t have her on top of us. Tra-la-la-ra-ra-la.” She began to walk again, humming to

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herself, off and on glancing at the girl. Then she spoke to Necato, still in the same gentle, matter-of-fact way.

“Lock her up again; give her something to eat. She’s frightfully pale again. I don’t know if she’ll be any good to me now, and certainly it would be impossible to take what we need from her for the *primum ens sanguinis* without running a great risk of a private funeral. It’s just as well I didn’t have to preserve her for Monsieur Richard.” Then, turning to Christine: “And, by the way, Miss, I am writing him to-day that you have left me in a huff and I don’t know where you’ve gone—which would have been true, after all, if you’d had your way.”

Christine wanted to threaten, to plead, to argue, but her mind was as leaden as her body. Only later she realized that Necato had said to her mistress that she had learned of the Master’s decision to have the festival after the first new moon in April, and Madame had responded that in that case the *primum ens sanguinis* might have time to work.

These odd, disquieting words rang in the girl’s ears as she lay again on the hard couch in the little prison room.

The new moon, the April moon, that was the time fixed for the “experiment.” Last night there had been a moon; supposing it was the very last of the waning moon, how long would there be till the new? Oh, why hadn’t she ever noticed about the moon!

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But there would be a little respite, surely, and in that time perhaps Catalin would miss her, would get suspicious. Catalin was not cruel. And anyway, it was all too fantastic. People didn’t do those things, not unless they were stark, raving mad. And Madame was not that. No, it was all some very poor joke from which she would know how to extricate herself once she had slept. Strangely enough, she could sleep.

Whether hours or days had gone by when she woke up, she didn't know, but she felt weak as if she had been without food for a long time. It was daylight. The rain drizzled outside. There was a blanket over her and a pillow under her head. On a chair beside the bed there was a tray with milk, eggs and bread. She smiled bitterly. It was for all the world like Hansel and Gretel being fattened up by the witch.

Witch—her mind circled slowly around this word. It took on the human shape of Madame as she had stood there in the laboratory, so smoothly calm and moralizing, if you please, because she, Christine, hadn't been willing to stay and run the risk of death in order to improve Madame's complexion. So great is the power of words that the girl had almost for a moment felt conscience-stricken.

Necato was horrible, terrifying, but at the thought of Madame she felt at once paralyzed and nauseated; even to think of her was like the sudden glimpse of a snake. Of course snakes

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wouldn't bite her; she was their sister, a smooth, pliant symbol of absolute evil.

She was evil. Wasn't that what was meant by a witch? The Basques were right; there were witches, completely evil people. But not so simple to identify. Hadn't Madame herself explained that she was against "useless" cruelty? And she could be kind and winning when that suited her purpose or even when she was indifferent. Max, of course, anyone could see what a morbid little brute he was, you might admit that to be like that one must be sick. That was Richard's theory.

Oh, Richard! She felt a flash of anger against him. Madame—Lydia—was good and self-sacrificing, a sufferer! If he only knew! But then he might say she too was sick. Sick—healthy—evil. And good? Her thoughts lost themselves in the haze of a stupor.

She woke up, but luckily without opening her eyes, at the sound of voices. It was Madame and Necato, Madame saying blandly and coolly:

"She's been like this now for four days; what do you think we'd better do?"

"Leave her till we need her. She won't die, she's young, and it isn't as if she were ill; her blood is just as good, and there will always be enough left for you."

"How is Pacheco? You know, I can't have him last much longer!"

“You have only to say.”

“Oh, yes, I know! You and your poisons and

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pulverized toads and baby-fat! But you don't realize that there is such a thing in this modern world of police as cutting people up to find out what they died of. No, he must die—naturally. You can't starve him, of course; that's too evident, but isn't it damp enough down there?”

“He was as strong as an ox, and it takes a long time.”

“But doesn't he believe in the wax doll any more? Don't you stab its heart, its head?”

“Madame knows perfectly well that all I can do is as nothing to the power of Madame!”

“Yes, yes—but what good would it do me to kill him and be a nervous wreck myself? I had to go to bed for a week each time I tried it. There is nothing, nothing, which takes strength out of me so! Each time I had a new set of wrinkles. And there must be a limit to what the *primum ens sanguinis* can correct!”

“Madame?”

“Well?”

“If she doesn't die, I have an idea.”

“To finish her and put her down under the big oak?”

“Something better. If we bind up her wound carefully we can take her with us to the meeting. And they say the Master has not had a human sacrifice for hundreds and hundreds of years. He would be pleased with us; he might show us the inner rooms; he might make you queen.”

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“Oh, as to that, now that I hear he has honored Catalin—I don't really care. But—the treasure is in the inner rooms?”

“They say so—oh, they say it is a sight to burn the eyes, so much gold, so many sparkling stones!”

“It doesn't tempt you, Necato?”

“Madame!” There was horror in the voice. “There is a guard around that treasure which would blast dead even the innocent who looked at it without his permission.”

“Oh, he has men there all the time?”

“No, Madame, what does he need with men? His words guard the treasure, his maledictions.”

“Is such superstition possible!—About Catalin, are you sure of her?”

“Not at all. Since the Master favored her that night, she is impudent and disobedient. And curious. She keeps asking me what has become of Pacheco, and yesterday she tried to find out about this one. I wish we could dare to get rid of her!”

“You had better not. But try to get her to visit her relatives. Meanwhile keep fresh food here for the girl. Don’t speak to her. Don’t come in unless you know she’s asleep. Still, if she doesn’t eat, there’s this advantage that she can’t try to escape.”

They went out, locking the door. Christine resolved at once to eat. There was hope in Catalin then. But Catalin too seemed to be in league with this mysterious man who was the chief of the murdering witch-gang. The hope tarnished.

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She wept silently, long, slow streams of tears that she was too weak to wipe away. Like all simple souls, she asked herself aghast what she had done that this should happen to her. The day in Biarritz when she had been storm-tossed on the rocks came to her mind—now indeed she had met a stronger will, a veritable force.

But it was evil. The idea of evil suddenly beat down on her with hard, black wings. It was stronger than anything. Madame could send her evil will out of her body, could hurt other bodies, even as she could command the black dog without words.

And yet there was probably nothing in the world except mad, mechanical atoms. She saw them in myriads, swirling about her before she drifted into another stupor.

She woke up at night, her head clear. There was a little silvery thread of light in the room. She looked up through the high window—the new moon was hanging in the darkness. But she failed to admire its bent and glistening beauty, her heart thumped ominously at what it meant.

It was at the first new moon that Madame had been going to make the *primum ens*, the draught made out of the herb Melissa, and *Sanguinis*—blood—the blood they wanted to draw from her thin wrists. She clutched her wrist. Should she cut herself first? Or beat her head against the wall?

But she had hardly force enough to sit upright

and stare at the moon. She listened to the dead quiet of the night.

When would they come for her?

In numb terror, with hypnotic clearness, she saw herself strapped to the black marble table in the tower laboratory, the sparks flying upward from the forge, the horrible, bearded, slit-eyed face of Necato—the yet more horrible smooth hardness of Madame, the thin, long, gleaming knife—the loathsome boy shrieking and dancing around—and the black, fiery-eyed dog licking the red drops, that dripped, dripped—

When would they come? Even her terror flowed away in the intensity of her listening.

Were there voices coming from the moon?

Was it a noise of heavy footsteps in the courtyard?

Several people pounding up the stairs. Catalin's voice calling, "Mademoiselle!"

She tried to call, but her voice broke. She sat up, lifting her arms to be ready to greet them.

Then part of the recess in the wall of the room slid softly back, and Necato stepped through from behind, flung the girl over her shoulder like a sack, and disappeared into the yawning darkness, sliding the secret door shut behind her.

Catalin, carrying a torch and followed by those of her male relatives whom she had dragooned into aiding her, burst into the empty room. She glanced at the bed. Someone had just lain there, but who? If she could only search

everywhere, but the men were in a panic. They could hear Max screaming like a wild-cat. In frightened haste they tumbled down-stairs and deserted. They were gone, away over the fields.

She had better be gone too, before the Comtesse showed herself, and this time she would take courage and carry her complaint to the Master.

While the baffled rescue party was still lingering in that upper room in the east tower, sounding far more numerous and ferocious than they really were, Necato appeared with her burden in the court-yard below where the

secret stair opened out, and where she had tracked Christine only the week before. At the stable she found Madame, who had a horse ready for her and handkerchiefs to blindfold and gag the girl.

“What are you doing with me?” Christine found strength enough to stammer just before the gag was applied, and she heard Madame’s sweetly ironical voice close to her ear,

“We are, in the most delightfully literal way, sending you straight to the Devil!”

The human burden was inert across the saddle in front of Necato, to whom Madame flung an immense billowing black cape with an enormous hood; it hid her and the girl completely.

“Remember,” was her mistress’s parting word, “that all I ask in return for this present is some of the blood. I depend on you to get me enough.”

Necato took a path behind the stables, looking monstrous as she rode off in the dim starlight.

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If a late passer-by should meet her, he would cross himself and run, thinking she were that withering mountain-specter, the Basa-Yauna.

During that ride, shaken, buffeted, half-choked, one pure terror wavered through Christine’s remnant of a mind: If these were the disciples, what was the Master?

The horse began to climb rocky paths and to make steep descents. If she could jerk away from Necato’s long, sinewy arm, she would eagerly throw herself over the precipice.

Necato rose in the stirrups as if she were looking at something, muttering that they must have been misled. There were lights below, the feast must have begun a week too soon. In her surprise she let go of the girl, who at once rolled off the horse and tried to tear the bandage from her eyes. But Necato was upon her before she could get up. Producing a rope, she tied her hands and feet. “Perhaps you’re right, my pretty one; it would be better to leave you here while I go to find out if you’d be a welcome present.”

She put her amongst some bushes, and rode away. The sudden hope gave Christine strength. She sawed the rope off across a bit of sharp rock. Soon she was free, though she was too exhausted to do more than crawl along towards the lights and music in the valley. She could hardly believe her eyes when she saw through the trees that people were dancing to a

lilting, sweet, inciting music, lit by smoking torches. Soon she was crouching

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behind a shrubbery at the edge of the open place. A strange and magnificent sight met her.

A mass of whitish rock rose up and filling nearly the whole of it was a gigantic, roundly swung arch, forming an entrance to a huge grotto. Stretching in under it a black lake gleamed in the light of torches fastened in the massive rock pillars that here and there divided it. Against this background moved and laughed and danced about a hundred young Basques and Basquaises in gay and fantastic costumes.

Never had Christine seen a fandango so full of fire and fleetness. In her excitement she pressed forward, her fair head showing like a strange flower in the shrubbery. Before she could duck her head, a crowd of the young men had leaped at her hiding place. They dragged her out roughly. They were already lifting their sticks against her when one of them jumped to protect her with his body. It was Corneille, the coachman from the castle. He waved the others off and appealed loudly to a tall man in black who stood off to one side.

Evidently a command was given, for a couple of the youths led Christine to the yawning grotto, where a boat took them across to the vast, barely lighted stone hall beyond. Here they ascended a crude gallery and put the girl into a little stone cell, fixing a torch in the wall. It was really a cave without a ceiling, the rough walls went up and were lost in primeval darkness. She curled herself up in a corner, a small,

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white, forlorn thing. When she heard people coming in the gallery outside she began to tremble. When hands removed the stones before the cave, she cried out—in the red, uncertain light of the torch the man in black who stepped in had the gloom of an executioner. Lifting her thin little hands, she pleaded tearfully: “Let me go; I have done nothing. I was brought here against my will—I—”

“Who brought you?”

She took courage. Surely this was the man who had once guided her back to the castle. His face was sharp and strong, ruddy and brown. He had an air of imperious severity but not of anger.

“Necato brought me—” She stopped, making an impossible attempt to squeeze still further up against the rock, for the gypsy had plunged into the cave, but she paid no attention to Christine. She flung herself at the tall man’s feet, groveling like an animal.

“I brought her, Master, with great trouble. My mistress sends her to you as a present, so that you will let her come to the feast again. I told her that for hundreds and hundreds of years the god had had no real sacrifice, and this one is young and pure and safe. Not a soul knows where she is. But let me do it, Master; I have a beautiful knife. Let me do it!”

The man in black made an astonished gesture and stepped back from her. “Wait,” he commanded, “while I question the girl.”

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He turned to Christine. “Who are you, where do you come from, how did you come here?”

Involuntarily she tried to rise, but collapsed against the wall. “My name is Christine Tancrede. The Comtesse de Gorostegui wanted to bleed me to—to make herself young, and this night people tried to save me, but this woman tied me and brought me here—she was to bring my blood to Madame—”

“It’s a lie!” screamed Necato. “She’s nothing but a spy in league with the curé!”

“Is it a lie too,” said Christine shrilly, “that you and your mistress are killing Monsieur de Gorostegui and that she wants to steal the treasure of the man you call Master; is that a lie? I heard you!” She turned to the man in black. “I have one friend at the castle. Her name is Catalin; let her vouch for me.”

The guard at the door received a brief order, and soon Catalin burst in, but a gorgeous Catalin, shining in red and gold. She made straight for Christine and caught her in her arms. “Oh, Mademoiselle, my poor Mademoiselle, do not think I deserted you. This very night I meant to ask help from our Master, who is here.” She indicated the man in black, who said with an ominous edge:

“You are very much to blame, Catalin, for not having told me before what went on at the castle.”

Catalin hung her lovely head. “Master, I did

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not dare. Who was I, a servant girl, to accuse my mistress when you had let her join us once, and when I might not have been able to prove my suspicions. And I know too that Gorostegui was the curé's friend and your enemy. It was only when they attacked Mademoiselle—"

There was a cry from Christine, "Necato!" She pointed to the opening. Necato had quietly disappeared. Outside a hue and cry started after her, but the guards came back, shamefaced, confessing that she seemed to have sunk into the earth.

"We can wait," their chief said somberly. "And now, Mademoiselle, where would you like my people to take you? To Biarritz? Not to the Castle Gorostegui!"

A spasm of terror shook the girl. "Oh!" she gasped, "Oh, wherever I go that woman will follow me. She said she would. But she's afraid of you. They both are. Let me stay here, let me be safe here until you catch them. You will catch them?"

He nodded his head. "I will!—As for your staying here," he looked at her as if she awakened some memory in him, "it would be possible, yes. We may need you, too, as witness against them.—Catalin, we shall need you too, and it would be dangerous for you to return. As for Gorostegui, he will have to wait. After all, he would gladly exterminate every one of us.—Tell Marichu that you and Mademoiselle are going to stay in the inner house, and she is to get rooms

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ready for you. At once. Mademoiselle is fainting!"

Christine barely heard Catalin's eager assurances, then she sank into deep, cool, soothing darkness.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

“‘W HAT is your name?’”
“Must I have a name? Well, then, my name is Miguel Duhalde.”

Christine was amazed at her own audacity, and even more that it had succeeded. For an instant he had dropped the impersonal, attentive manner of a doctor. She smiled.

He rose. “You are better. Catalin, in a couple of days, if the sun shines, you may take Mademoiselle into the valley garden.”

The girl watched the tall black figure disappear behind the soft curtain. She was better now. She could think both forwards and backwards, not just about the face of Catalin bending over her, or the luminous disk in the wall, or the odd soothing touch of the man in black who came now and then. For two days she had been able to notice the room where she lay in bed. It was like any room except that it had no window and no door. A pale milky light came at intervals from a round, shining disk set in the wall. The ceiling shone redly, like polished granite. The walls were hung with bluish tapestries in faded patterns, and something thickly soundless covered the floor. Instead of a door, a woven, many-colored curtain shut off the entrance. Cool, fresh air flowed in mysteriously. And the stillness was like the heart of night or the heart of a mountain.

Catalin sat in a low seat near the light and

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sewed. She was in flowing white. A pang went through Christine to see the fine, sulky profile, the mass of lustrous black hair. Ever since she had lost Richard, she had thought with disgust of what she considered her own irregular face and insipid hair. But she was angry with Richard. He should have left her mind when the fever left her body. During that fever, when she lay hot and tossing, screaming sometimes with the fear of Madame, whom she saw bending over her with a glistening knife, it was not Richard who had saved her. The strange man in black had come, and his long, strong, cool hands had brought her back to sanity, and his voice, so firm and credible, insisting that she was safe with him. And he had told Catalin to

give her lovely smooth things to drink, things that made her sleep sound and dreamless.

He must certainly be a doctor, and all that had happened was part of the fever, and this was a hospital. Catalin was a nurse, all in white. But did nurses wear Greek tunics?

“Catalin, where am I? Who is Miguel Duhalde?”

“He will tell you, Mademoiselle, when he wants to and if he wants to. I am his servant and yours, but you must sleep now.”

Catalin left, and the light with her, but Christine did not go to sleep at once as she had before. Her mind was not so docile now. What was this curious rock-room? She wanted to think, but a drowsiness stole over her just the

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same. She struggled against it, wanted to listen to a wild, sweet music that was beginning in some far distance. It was like nothing she had ever heard, and yet it reminded her of something. Yes. In the Hall of the Mountain King.

Surely that was where she was, then, in the hall—of—but why was he always in black? She slept.

For several days of the shining disk, Miguel Duhalde had not come. Christine was just deciding she would arise and explore for herself what might be at the other side of the bright wool-curtain, when Catalin hurried in, her arms full of clothes.

“Mademoiselle, you are to put these on, and I am to take you out; the sun is shining.”

She began dressing the girl in old but beautiful clothes, softly flowering things, dull blues, a clear white airy fichu. Christine regretted bitterly that the little oddly chased silver mirror was insufficient. And even this was taken from her when Catalin approached respectfully with a large white kerchief.

“His orders are to blindfold you, Mademoiselle, but I will take your arm.”

They went up, they went down, fountains tinkled near them, gradually the air got warmer, and at last they were in the open. Catalin took off the bandage and Christine looked around blinking.

They seemed to be on the other side of the mountain into which the great cave with the lake

opened. They were in a small, narrow valley, perhaps rather a large cleft, opening on wild mountains that shut off any outlook except on them and the blue sunshiny sky.

It was an exquisite day, quivering with spring. The girl half sat, half fell down, overcome by the air, the effort of walking, the bright light. She closed her eyes. Only after several minutes was she able to see.

The cleft was no ordinary accident in the mountain-side, although a casual glance from above might not have discerned anything except a greater profusion of flowers than elsewhere. But Christine, stretched on a low, flat, lichened rock, could see that the most ingenious care had guided nature. The sides of the cleft were covered with gorse, their branches curved gracefully, laden with gold and dipping suavely against the pure blue sky. A brook, clear as glass, ran out of the mountain, leaped foaming over the terraces cut here and there, swung then in an easy curve over miniature meadows full of daisies, buttercups, red clover, forget-me-nots, a thousand little red and blue and yellow things. Willows hung their fluffy tassels just at the spot where they were mirrored in the calm bright surface of a little pond, where water-lilies rose. Hawthorn bushes, pricked with pale buds, leaned against a rough obelisk of red rock, and all the colors seemed to sing together in the warm spring sunshine with the humming voices of bees and the liquid calling of birds.

To her own great surprise, Christine felt tears running down her cheeks. She wiped them away hastily, looking around ashamed, but Catalin had silently vanished.

She was alone. Alone at least in the valley garden, though not in the visible world. Among the dark pines on the near mountain, there was a patch of vivid emerald green, an upland pasture, where she could see a herd of big, cream-colored oxen grazing, guarded by two or three youths, and in the blue haze veiling the further mountains there were moving spots of white with tinkling bells—sheep, that probably had their shepherds.

She wondered for a moment why Miguel Duhalde would let strangers come so close to his treasure-house, and decided they were probably members of a gang of smugglers of which he was the chief, and then she gave herself to the sun again.

With a start she sat up. She must have slept, and long. The sun had risen to high noon; it was almost too warm. She considered seeking the shade of one of the slender umbrella pines that rose darkly here and there, or even of walking up to the vast shadowy cypress that stood sentinel against the mountain side, near the source of the brook.

It was a grim tree, a dignified tree, pyramidal, almost black, refusing to be cajoled into color by the sunshine.

One could be afraid of a tree like that, mused

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the girl, and then she was unpleasantly startled by seeing part of the tree detach itself and walk toward her. She cried out, then laughed nervously; it was only Miguel Duhalde in his black clothes; he must have come out of the mountain from behind the tree. He came to her with long strides.

"I frightened you?" His voice was really concerned. He sat down beside her and took her hand as if to feel her pulse. His touch was warm, dry, firm. Out of the corner of her eye, she noted his odd, half-clerical, half-medieval costume, his clear, sunburnt face, more black-browed, more domineeringly Basque than any she had yet seen, and more haughtily handsome.

But he was not formidable, not angry because she was a foreigner; simply impersonal. She would ask about things.

"Are you a doctor?" she asked, as if they had just met each other in the world of tea-parties. He dropped her hand and smiled. It was as if the sun had suddenly reached the night of the cypress tree.

"Once in a while I am—but just now I am lending fancy costumes, like the one you're wearing."

"It was all Catalin brought me!"

"I know; your own were torn when you crawled through the furze, and besides, I was wondering whether you might not look like someone who came here long ago. She was a Scotch woman, an ancestor of yours, perhaps?"

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He rose, half shut his long, narrow eyes and considered her critically. "It is quaint, the colors are soft, your hair is the right shade—but—your expression!"

At that moment indeed Christine's expression was anything but softly quaint. A flash of her old independent self gleamed in her eyes, and she

stuck out a definite chin.

“Let me thank you, Monsieur, for all you have done for me—but now that I am quite well again, I should like my own clothes back. I can mend them, and in one of the coast towns I am sure to find work.”

If this Miguel Duhalde thought she could be treated like a doll, he would find he was mistaken.

Evidently he had guessed that, for his own amused expression instantly changed. “What!” he exclaimed, “you’re angry because I wanted to see how your beauty could best be set off? You haven’t noticed how perfect Catalin is in that Greek tunic, and if you saw her in—”

“Yes,” Christine interrupted, “but I can tell without seeing Catalin that *your* costume isn’t at all the thing for your complexion. Why do you wear black? The other Basques are much more sensible to wear white—with your hair and eyes and skin, black is—” she wavered a little, his face expressed a mixture of amazement and anger, apparently he had never been disrespectfully spoken to before, but she finished calmly, “—black is too somber, too like a priest!”

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He decided to laugh, a little ruefully.

“Well, why do I wear black? And why do I live in a mountain, and why were those people dancing in front of the grotto, and why was the old gypsy afraid of me, and why is Catalin here, and why were you blindfolded, and why—those are some of the questions you want to ask me?”

She nodded. He did not have to be a mind-reader to guess that!

He sauntered about a bit, came back to her, sat down and bored his long, dark, narrow eyes into hers. “I wear black in mourning for myself, and if I am to answer your other questions you will have to promise to stay here at least until I have settled with Madame who calls herself Gorostegui. But, you may leave this very hour, only then you will have to swear never to mention this experience, never to try to find out more about it, never to come back here—and if you break your oath the penalty is death, absolutely sure and certain death.” He said this without the least tone of a threat, but with a cool, convincing sincerity.

“You don’t have to threaten me,” she said hotly. “If I promised not to tell, I shouldn’t.”

“Do you know, I believe you,” he said thoughtfully, “and when do you want to go?”

Christine began to pick the lichen off the rock. She found herself somewhat embarrassed. But since there was no way of retreating gracefully, she retreated frankly.

“I don’t want to go. I am too curious. I promise

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to stay here until you don’t need me. Why—do you wear black? How can you say you are in mourning for yourself when you seem so much alive?”

She gave a fleeting glance to his broad shoulders, his lithe, slim-flanked height.

“I am the last Devil,” he said quite simply, “and when I die, which will be soon, many good things will die with me, so I wear the color of death for myself and them.—This garden must go back to the wilderness, after I don’t myself know how many thousands of years of care.” He looked away to the further mountains where the little white dots of sheep were tinkling their bells.

He wanted to mystify her, Christine thought, or else he was madly superstitious, like everybody else in this primitive country. But he spoke like an educated man, a man who had traveled—

“I have traveled, and I have the oldest education in the world, and I am decidedly not superstitious. Perhaps I was trying to mystify you a little, still it is true—I am he whom Monsieur le curé calls the Devil.—Hola, Ramuntcho!”

He stood up. A youth had scrambled down the hillside near them, carrying a gun. When he came close he uncovered and bent his head. His master spoke to him in Basque. He answered in the same language, was dismissed and scrambled away again. Miguel Duhalde scowled a little.

“Necato got back to the castle,” he told Christine. “The news is that she and her mistress never

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leave it, and that many men servants have come from the north. And Gorostegui is still alive. He interests you, doesn’t he?”

“Not very much,” she said candidly, “except that anybody would have suffered to see him tortured. I wonder why Madame hasn’t—hasn’t—” she hesitated, feeling it might sound brutal to state the callous fact.

“Hasn’t yet murdered him,” he finished. “She is afraid of the law, and perhaps now that she can’t rejuvenate herself at your expense she may want to resuscitate him as a husband.”

Catalin appeared, white and straight and calm. Miguel Duhalde rose. “You will have to be blindfolded a few times yet—but all your questions will be answered.”

“When?” she asked eagerly.

“The hour of noon is the Devil’s hour,” he smiled, “even more than midnight. It will not be long—”

He was gone, and Catalin blindfolded her, leading her back to her room. It was not, however, she discovered to her astonishment, the same room. It was larger, more richly furnished, and hung with exquisite old tapestries whose golden knights and ladies she could see by the light of day. There was a sort of window, a round opening in the thick and fortress-like rock wall. It was hung with creepers as with a living curtain, but through them she could look over luminous miles of spring-time country, an infinite soft carpet of rolling hills, hedged fields, far white

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villages, woods with a light-green golden sheen, and a blue glint of the distant sea.

Yet she was a prisoner. This room not only had a window but a very tangible door, black oak, barred and cross-barred. Miguel Duhalde didn’t trust her yet.

Probably he was a smuggler, in the grand style, though she had more than a suspicion that to furnish this room he must have smuggled antiques out of some seigneurial domain.

What extraordinary eyes he had. Was it normal to have them so long and so narrow, set back so far, and under such straight black brows? What color were they? She could not tell. When he had looked at her that time she was only aware that his gaze was going through her.

A cold little shiver ran down her back. She remembered that she had only thought that he wanted to mystify her, that although he spoke like an educated, traveled man, he must be mad or primitively superstitious to say he was—the Devil.

And he had repeated her thoughts after her as if they had been words!

Would it be fair to-morrow; would he come to the wild-flower terraces again?—If she changed that costume a little bit, opened it more at the

throat, for instance, and—she was nearly asleep when she realized that not once that day had she been tortured by thinking about Richard. An almost savage joy swept through her. She clenched her hands triumphantly. First love was

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not fatal then! It was possible to think about somebody else, perhaps to forget Richard. She cherished this discovery, dwelt on it, reveled in it.

And all the time she would take good care not to fall really in love with Miguel Duhalde. It was only because she was inexperienced that Richard had been able to hurt her so. Now she would know enough not to be serious, now it would be play. As for Miguel, he could take care of himself! And he was not indifferent to her. She could tell by the way his voice softened.

The Devil, indeed! Life was going to be immensely interesting.

But days went past, warm, golden, shimmering days, spent by Christine in the valley garden, alone. If she asked Catalin where the Master was, the girl shook her head uncommunicatively. She waited on Christine with deft and gentle skill, but she had fallen back into her old silences. Christine as yet knew no more of the strange world in which she lived than her tapestried room and the flowered valley cleft, but most of her time flowed on in the smooth, unthinking beatitude of convalescence. One amusement only she had. Every day Catalin brought her different clothes, of every style and period except the modern, and Christine spent titillating hours before a wreathed Venetian mirror which she had found one morning in her room. Naïvely she recorded that her hair was a brighter gold, her eyes a softer gray, her throat whiter

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and rounder than ever before. She enjoyed herself most in a Watteau-like costume which made her look like the frailest of Sevres shepherdesses. It made the daintiest unity with her appearance and yet she knew all the time she wasn't a bit like that inside.

What was she like inside, she asked herself, and she felt the core of tenacious will which had made her concentrate on leaving the prose of Lady Densham—and hadn't she!

She smiled. She was out in the valley garden, lying in the warm sunlight on a flat bare slab of stone, drawing in its mild heat through every pore.

She pressed her body in thin printed muslins against it; she laid her cheek on the granite, blending with the earth and the sun. The air was limpid, shimmering, saturated with the odors from the near pines, the spicy flowers, the scent of the sun-baked, rocky earth itself. The birds were chirping lazily; it was near noon.

Noon—the Devil’s hour! She could understand that. There was a tangible presence in this hushed, golden, scented heat. She could feel it behind her, something smiling, invading, softening, frightening—ah!—she sat up, a hot, light kiss had touched the back of her neck. And there was Miguel Duhalde, looking at her, sitting down beside her.

“Oh!” She drew a deep breath, saying half to herself as if he were an apparition that might melt away, “I believe you are the Devil!” And then, seeing his firm reality, she smoothed out

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her panniered skirt and said primly, “I didn’t hear you—where do you come from?”

“From the sea,” he said, as matter-of-factly as if the kiss had never happened. “I had to see how my sailors were.”

It was evident. Among these odors of earth and flowers he smelled of salt and tar and seaweed. He wore the vivid blue costume of the Basque fishers in which she had seen him first at Arraldia, his beret was jauntily on the side of his head, his face and throat were browner, weather-beaten.

“Oh, yes,” she said, “I remember reading in one of those old books from which that woman made me copy things, that the sea was the Devil’s proper element, being inconstant, like himself!”

“What book was that? I pass over the compliment.”

“It was—it was—I don’t remember the name, but—” she stopped, struck by an idea. In that book she now recalled there had been question of judging the Basques because they worshiped the Devil by thousands, and thought him a kind Master, worth dying for—women gave themselves to him because he was a god.—She looked bewildered at Miguel, and found his dark eyes fixed on her, going through her.

“Do you have to do that,” she pleaded, alarmed; “do you have to read my thoughts like that? It makes me most uncomfortable. How dare I think, then?”

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His eyes looked away and softened.

“No, I don’t have to, luckily. I promise you I won’t do it again. But I know what book you were reading. It was *De L’Ancre’s Tableau of the Inconstancy of Evil Angels*, wasn’t it? Yes, I know it. Who knows it better!”

His face darkened. He walked about. He still had a slightly rolling gait as if he had stepped off a ship.

What a captain, she thought, and it gave her pleasure to think of being a sailor and obeying his orders. And he spoke to her as if in command: “Try to remember that book. Tell me what you thought of it.”

“I don’t know that it gave me any impression, and yet—yes, I do remember that I disliked the judge who wrote the book, he was so vain of having condemned all those poor people to be burned to death. The judge himself wrote the book, three or four hundred years ago. But it did change one of my ideas. I always thought the church invented the witch-trials, or else that it was all hysterical old beggar-women, but that book made me wonder. The judge said that many of the accused were young and rich and beautiful, yet they didn’t want to escape the fire; they wanted to suffer for the Devil. But they called him their God and said he would give them eternal happiness, and had given them paradise even in this life, as if they had seen him, lived with him.

“A great deal of it comes back to me, and—”

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she spaced her words and watched him, “perhaps there was an old religion left here—which De L’Ancre stamped out!”

“No!” he shouted, “De L’Ancre only purified it!” and he began muttering to himself in Basque. Christine sat still, hardly daring to breathe, he looked so dark and savage. But when he started to walk away, she whispered, “Stay,” and he came back, throwing himself on the greensward near her.

“You understood,” he said gravely, “and I have only myself to consult, after all, as to whether I will tell you. Well, then, there are sparks of truth in the abominable conceits of that man’s book, and you are right. There was, there is still, an old religion here, the oldest of religions, and I am its priest. In a strange way I, and all my predecessors, are also the God. Now you know that the Christians thought any god who was not theirs was a devil; so we, the priest-gods, were called devils by them. This is the blackest injustice because our religion is to fight for the light and against the

darkness of evil, but in the way that those things happen we accepted the title. As a defiance. But it was wrong. We couldn't then keep out the superstitious, demon-worshiping, toad and snake and poison people. The evil people, the real devils. They clung to us, thinking we could teach them new tricks. Gypsies like Necato, pure evil wills like Lydia Gorostegui. They twisted in, those two, when I was preoccupied. Necato pretended she was one

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of us. We have foreign worshipers, and she drew the other after her. But Necato at least had some justification; the Gorosteguis had treated her badly and she wanted vengeance. We believe in vengeance."

"Good!" said Christine with sincere satisfaction, and he smiled for the first time, and continued, "But there must be justice in it. I told Necato she could lead the Gorostegui cattle astray, or something, but not that she could keep on persecuting him, torturing him. As for her mistress, I let her come to a festival once, but I had made up my mind never to let her come again. She and her child are breaths of hell; even her dog is!"

"You think there are wicked people then? You don't believe that they are really mentally ill, and ought to be forgiven?"

"The world is a fight between light and darkness. If you forgive the Lydia Gorosteguis, then they will win. If you repay evil with good, with what will you repay good? No, repay good with good, and evil with justice."

"I want to belong to your religion," said Christine with simple fervor. "I have always been wanting a religion."

He laughed. "I might enjoy teaching you. The Catalins are tiresomely obedient—"

"Oh—Catalin—she came to you for vengeance?"

"Yes, most of our people inherit their religion but they do bring others whom they trust and

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who want justice. The Doyenard woman did deliberately put suspicion of theft on this poor girl. I could have got her exposed, but she is the right hand of the curé, and she would have played Catalin some other trick."

"The curé—" the girl trembled a little. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Miguel had moved closer to her and she felt the weight

of his warm, handsome head in her lap. “—Is the curé your enemy?”

At these words he jumped up, his eyes flashing. “Is he my enemy? Yes, but not because he wants to kill me. No one can do that until my time comes, but he is my enemy because he thinks that ‘good’ means going to his church, and ‘evil’ means staying away from it. He and his have ruined the world!”

“What is good and evil?” she breathed.

“Evil is cruelty, and good—” he swung around, looked at the sun, “tomorrow I will explain to you what good is, but now the Devil’s hour is over!”

And he left her alone, her cheeks red as the little clovers in the miniature meadows, her thoughts troubled and amazed. The keen fragrance of the pines came to her on a light breeze, reminding her, awkwardly, of a walk she and Richard had taken together. She was surprised at a little pricking pain, and then she pooh-poohed it.

Not for anything in the world would she miss to-morrow.

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The next day was warmer, brighter, more still, more uncannily summer-like than any before it. Christine walked in the perfumed valley-garden a little before noon, trying to fasten her mind on the new flowers that every hour seemed to bring forth. The crevices in the rose-colored rocks were laced with a small blue flower, but an intense southern summer blue, a blue raised to the rank and intensity of red. And there were lilies, tall, cone-clustered lilies, white and candle-like; they decorated all the hillsides around, whole cathedrals full of them.

As she lifted her eyes she saw men and great creamy oxen far up on a mountain pasture. One of the men began to spring from rock to rock down towards her. She was disquieted. Ought she to give warning, to call out? But before she could make up her mind what to do, she thought she recognized the tall, lithe figure; and before she could make up her mind that she did recognize it, Miguel Duhalde stood before her. To-day for the first time she saw him all in white with a careless, red scarf around his waist and a red beret over one ear. He was like the strength and radiance of the sun incarnate, and shyly, breathlessly, she hurried to speak first.

“I didn’t know what to do when I saw someone coming here. Why do you let those men with the oxen come so near?”

“Because they are my oxen, my men, my outposts! No danger that any Basque not one of us

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will come near; they’re too afraid of the Devil, and if any stranger should come those men would turn them away. I had orders to give them about the May festival—which you are going to see. Because you will stay, even if I don’t, strictly speaking, need you as a witness against—that woman?”

He had been coming closer toward her, and she had been retreating with tiny steps, until she was almost against the wall of gorse that poured its shining blossoms down the rocks. In the sun they gave off a hot, spicy golden scent, a scent to drive an alchemist mad, a scent that nearly lost Christine her self-control. She was perfectly willing, she even thought of herself as cynically eager to attract this mysterious man, this strange, archaic, magnetic male, but she did not want to be troubled by it. And she knew, as one knows those things, that in spite of his low, steady voice and radiant calm, he was ready to take her in his arms if she wavered in the least.

In her desperation she turned botanical. “What—what do you call those lilies on the hills?” she asked, limpidly looking up at him.

He turned, and she tried to slip past him, out of the corner, but his brown, muscular arm stopped her, stayed around her quivering body.

“Asphodel, those flowers are,” he said, and smiled in her face, forcing her gently down on the grass beside him. “Asphodel, the Greek flower—and the Greeks knew that if cruelty is

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the nature of evil, then the nature of good is beauty—and love. All love is good—” and saying this he sought her lips.

For a moment she did not resist. It was as if the golden, odorous heat overwhelmed her—and then she struggled with all her might, every muscle taut and sincere, suddenly swept by the all-flooding memory of Richard, of his kisses. She was sealed to him; she could let no one else touch her, even if she would!

The instant Miguel felt the seriousness of her resistance, he let her go, but he still held her wrists, looking at her in the purest astonishment. She tried to hide her face, feeling that all the blood in her body had risen to it.

“What!” he exclaimed finally, “you don’t understand, or is it I who don’t? Am I mistaken for the first time in my life when I thought that you were utterly natural in spite of coming from the so-called civilized? I know you respond to me, and you won’t let yourself! Are you afraid?”

His eyes, warm, laughing, golden-brown in the sun, held hers, his voice sank caressingly. “Don’t be afraid! Love is the law of our religion, but it is love on your terms. Even the fools who wrote silly books about us knew that women were—safe when they gave themselves to the Devil. It was as they wanted. Love is good for its own sake.” Again he pressed a hard kiss on her lips, and again she wrested herself away. All her body yearned toward him; he was so strong, so radiant. To obey him would be like yielding to the sun or

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the hot strength of the south wind, but something sat in her soul and forbade it.

“I am not afraid,” she stammered finally, “but—”

“But you are shy—” he murmured, and took her gently in his arms, where she lay too tired to struggle, “I had forgotten how young and shy you are—”

Her blood, running like sunlight through her, thrilled to his nearness, but after an instant she drew away.

“No,” she said, simply and clearly, “I am really not shy. I even thought I wanted to make you love me, and I should have come to you, if—I weren’t in love already. Yes,” she sobbed a little, “I am in love with someone else. Nothing can change that!”

She hardly dared look at him, fearing to see either pain or anger. But when she did look, she saw only amazement. He would not let go her hands.

“I don’t mind in the least,” he said. “You are honest to tell me, but I am not jealous. It doesn’t matter at all, even if you want to go back to him later. Understand that I am not a jealous god!”

“But,” she said, frowning with incomprehension, “I wasn’t thinking about you. I was thinking about him. I must be loyal to him, you see.”

“What a stiff, ugly, Christian idea,” he exclaimed, half-laughing still. “I tell you you will love him better for having loved me—if you’re

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considering him. But let us forget him for the time being!”

“But that’s just what I can’t!” she said desperately. “I can’t forget him, although he doesn’t love me at all; he doesn’t even know I am being loyal to him. And it’s not true, either, that I feel I must be loyal. It’s just simply that I can be nothing else. Can’t! It’s impossible to explain! I don’t understand it myself.”

Miguel leaped to his feet, as if making a sudden decision, and aided her to get up. “But if this—imbecile—doesn’t want you, then there is nothing to hinder you from staying here for a while, if I let you decide whether I may touch you or not, is there?”

She shook her head. In spite of everything she had hoped intensely that he would not send her away.

He bent and kissed her hand, light as the touch of a flower petal. “Then you are going to do something for me which the beautiful, dutiful Catalins have never done, give me a new pleasure—”

“What!” she interrupted, slightly alarmed by his meekness.

He threw back the long lock of black hair that fell over his forehead, and smiled, “—the strange new pleasure of feeling myself human. Neither god nor devil. For a little while. Try to keep from thinking I am mad, and let me show you the house where you live. Where you could live—”

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He strode straight towards the blank mountain wall. Christine looked in vain for a cave or even a hole in the expanse of stone through which she had passed blindfolded every day. There was nothing, except the little crack through which the waters of the brook were gushing. But Miguel pushed aside a few bushes and creepers, and a large rock swung aside as easily and quietly as a door. He laughed at the girl’s astonishment.

“We learned that from the Egyptians,” he said, drawing her after him into a large darkly gleaming hall. “There were engineers in the world before the twentieth century. For thousands of years people have lived here. And every generation has added something to the rock house. You have the room built by the second half of the fifteenth century. We have learned from the Egyptians, the Romans, the Arabs, how to conduct heat and air and water through the mountains and how to slide the rocks in place that hide us from the world. Even if you enter the big lake grotto, you would never suspect that there was more here than the great hall and the little

caves by it and the stalagmite and stalactite galleries. Only those who know can penetrate the Inner House.”

“But,” she said, “I told you I heard Madame ask Necato if the ‘treasure’ was kept in the inner house. Aren’t you afraid someone will find it, if it is known that there is a treasure and an inner house?”

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“Every mountain around here is supposed to have a treasure. We spread those fables long ago. And we are well guarded. First, by terror, and secondly by servants whom we know as we do ourselves. Certain families inherit the honor of being our servants.”

They had passed out of the dark vaulted hall and they were in a carved and colonnaded gallery, chiseled out of the granite by the labor of innumerable years. A curious opaline light fell on its myriad fantastic details, suns and moons with human faces, winged bulls, hieroglyphic signs. Here and there a black door broke the bright tracery or side galleries diverged from it, some in partial ruin.

Miguel left this decorated main gallery and Christine followed him up a winding stair, cut like the rest in the rock. At the top he opened a door for her.

Dazzled at first by the sunlight, she thought she was out-of-doors, especially as she was met by waves of the sweet, sharp odor of flowering lemon and orange trees. But it was not out-of-doors, although sunshine lit the hall, filtering through a skillful, central opening. Around this square of golden light were white marble columns carved into airy laciness and between them stood the low blossoming trees. The walls glistened with golden arabesques and vividly colored mosaics. In the center a fountain plashed diamond-drops in the sunlight.

Christine gasped. “Thousand and one nights!”

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“It is,” Miguel smiled, throwing himself on one of the silky divans by the gleaming wall. “It came by way of Granada, from where one of my predecessors brought it.” He struck a little tinkling gong.

Two girls came in, carrying a little table which they placed by the divan. Christine thought them even more beautiful than Catalin; they were browner, more supple, more exotic. In simple white tunics, they moved about silently with downcast eyes, and left as noiselessly as they had come.

The table was covered with a costly cloth and precious dishes to which the meal itself was a strange contrast. A loaf of country bread, some eggs framed in pale green salad, cheese, fruit and wine. Miguel poured the wine into the thin, gleaming crystal goblet by her plate; it flowed out a purply, violet red. She drank; it made her think of earth, and at the same time of wild strawberries. It was earthy as if it had been poured out of a large clay jar buried a long while in cool black soil, and it was fragrant and delicious like violets and spring hedges after a shower. Neither sweet nor acid, it glided smoothly down; there was no bitterness in it. She felt an Olympic calm in her soul, and a certain warmth.

Looking at the haughty planes of Miguel's face, she once more experienced regret that fate had bound her so helplessly not to love him. If she could have been one of the men herding his

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oxen, it would have been sheer joy to obey him. Something undoubtedly radiated from him which would make one either recoil in terror, or feel a keen, humble desire to be ruled by him. It was not, like Madame's, a power which made her feel suspicious and uneasy. No; in his presence she felt as secure and calm as a flower in sunlight. Not quite calm, perhaps, she kept thinking of the vivid beauty of the serving girls, and she asked him why they wore a symbol embroidered on their tunics, a sort of golden wheel. She had seen it before on the old graves in Arraldia, and here she saw it repeated everywhere, in mosaics, in carvings, in the subtly colored rugs. In a voice that she tried to make reverent, she asked if the sun were their god and the wheel, or disk, his symbol.

To her great relief, he laughed, but refused to commit himself as to what he actually believed. All he knew, he said, was that the Basques had been sun-worshippers, and that the disk of the sun was sacred, and fire, and the moon, and certain animals. After the severe persecutions of their cult three hundred years ago, the traditions transmitted from one priest to another had been thin and sparse; there had not always been time to teach the old languages in which the sacred books were written, the books themselves were lost, and he had had to piece much of the history and ritual together. He had been brought up in the rock house by an old man, wrinkled as

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a mummy, who had taught him his powers and his duties, had sent him traveling the world, had invested him with his robes of office, and had died before he could tell his young successor for sure whether or not another should be appointed in due time.

“But I know I shall be the last priest of the sun, the last god, the last devil,” he ended smiling, and Christine shuddered to see his narrow, half-closed eyes which were not smiling under their straight black brows, but stern and fixed as if on some terrible, far-off sight.

He saw her slight tremor, and brought himself back. Without his touching her, without his moving an inch nearer, she felt enveloped in his low, vibrant voice. “I have servants, but I never had a human being to whom I could speak before. I hate the world. I hate the noise and the machines. I thought I hated everyone who belonged to the monster now threatening us—the last people of the sun. I hope I shall die in the old way, no matter how horrible it is, before I live to see the monster win. But you have lived in the midst of that world, and still you have escaped. I can talk to you. You have no idea how strange and wonderful it is to talk to you.”

“I hope you like this dress,” Christine said with absurd inconsequence.

He laughed. “I never saw your dress. I even forgot that you are lovely —”

“How can you say that,” she was agitated,

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“when you have living goddesses here waiting on you, like Catalin, and like those two who were here.”

“Oh, Lisalda and Marichu?” His face was as indifferent as his voice. “But you don’t understand yet that they think I am a superior being—a god, or a devil, if you like. They and a dozen like them are hereditarily mine; they are the last of the priestesses sacred to the God. They don’t know that; they are as simple and ignorant as they are beautiful. I know they think of me as the Devil, but in their mythology the Devil is God.”

Christine felt both drowsy and gay. “I wonder what it feels like,” she mused, “to be Devil.”

“What does it feel like to be crown-prince?” he exclaimed. “You’re born a crown-prince and you think no more about it. Well, I was born—Devil. The old priest said he knew it by certain signs on me. It seems fantastic and melodramatic to you; it seems all too natural to me! I have not shown you everything—yet.”

“Will you?” she asked hopefully.

He gave her a sidelong glance. “I don’t know. Why should I, after all? First, I must have a look at this man you speak of. I hear he is at the castle.”

“Oh!” she cried in real alarm. “You won’t hurt him, will you?”

“No! What would be the point?” he asked, surprised. “You have this heathen idea of jealousy mixed up with love.”

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She was puzzled. “Are you sure,” she ventured, “that those—servants of yours will not mind your letting them wait on me?”

“You will never understand,” he shook his head. “Are you jealous if the sun shines on anyone besides you? No more are they. No more am I. Your Richard is safe—forgive me for reading his name, it is too visible on your face. There is no reason for me even to see him; my only score is with his hostess. But even that can wait a little. Come, I want to show you more of the rock house, and you shall choose the room you like the best.”

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CHAPTER NINE

CHRISTINE was wandering about the streets of an old town by the sea. Miguel had taken her with him, because she had begged not to be left alone in the rock house with Catalin while he went out with the fishermen. All night long she had half-slept in a lumbering ox-cart going down from the hills. Now she was here, dressed like a girl of the people, that is to say, she wore a bright woolen sweater, a very short skirt, *espadrilles* on her feet, and no hat. She had orders to be dumb if anyone spoke to her in Basque. Or in Breton, for the wintering Bretons and their women were still enlivening the town, the men in their scarlet overalls, the women with white butterfly bonnets. But there were few people about, it was too early in the afternoon for the boats to be in, and it was between seasons for the tourists. The town slept on the gray moist April day. There was a warm sense of spring behind the cloud curtain. All the trees were unfolded now in vivid greens except the pale red and yellow oaks. There were hens with chickens, clucking, scraping, fussing. The girl watched them, smiling, over the fence in a back-yard. Ordinarily she hated hens, but at present her mind was so calm, so bland and contented to be under the orders of Miguel that she couldn't stop to resent even a hen.

He had told her how to dress, had ordered her to wait until he came in with the fishers that

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afternoon. She didn't think forward, she hardly thought backward. She had classified and accommodated the new facts in her life.

By an explicable accident she had fallen into the hands of Miguel Duhalde, almost the sole survivor of an old cult, a religion like any religion, although he and his abode were unlike anything. Although she had now seen most of the lacy labyrinth of rooms and halls and galleries in the rock house, it was still vastly mysterious to her. Many of its treasures were so old they were falling to pieces, while the dust of centuries covered others. Miguel could not keep up everything. She had yet to see the treasure, and to see his room, which she imagined of an opulence excelling even the hall from Granada.

And who was the master of all this, outside the rock house, in the dull eyes of the authorities? Only Miguel Duhalde, erratically appearing owner and cultivator of the old farm Miguelchenborda, which he had from his adopted father. He had a few young men in his service who herded his cattle on the mountains and cut the bracken in autumn. And he was a fisher off and on. He was the owner of the boat St. Michel in which he was now out.

Was she in love with him, she asked herself often and anxiously. Was she unfaithful in her mind to Richard? She could say neither yes nor no. All she knew was that in Miguel's presence she let her mind rest in the energy so confident, so absolute, so electric that radiated from him.

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She wished that her whole being could be open to his domination, that she could humbly accept being a servant in the rock house, always, forever. When she saw him, lithe and archaically handsome, with the lyre-horned big cream oxen on the mountain-side, she thought of the herds of Apollo, thought in bewilderment that he really must be the last incarnation of the sun-god.

And yet, there it was; she could not be free to lose her will entirely in his. Once and for all, and apparently beyond her power to change it, she had installed Richard in her soul, and he could not be wrested out. And it came to her mind that the servants in the rock house were all young, very young. There would be no "always" about belonging to Miguel. There would be a long winter after that summer.

Ingenuously she wondered if she couldn't have Miguel to worship and Richard to be her comrade.

Leaning over the fence, she began to relive the long, eager talks she had had with Richard, when everything bloomed into new significance, when a trembling warmth first flowed into her heart. Why, after all, had she begged to come down to the sea with Miguel, if she hadn't hoped in a veiled corner of her being that she might by chance see Richard?

She walked along again, turning into the main street with its bright medley of little shops. A couple were looking into a jewelry window; they

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were strangers, she could tell by their clothes, perhaps English, perhaps Spanish.

And yet, when she came closer, she was not really surprised to see that it was—Richard and Madame. No, she kept feverishly repeating, she was not surprised. She had thought she might see him—and all the while her heart was going as fast as her feet, which carried her past them almost at a run. Her throat went dry at the thought that they might turn around and see her.

Once out of the street, she ran instinctively down to the sea, to the harbor, and there she huddled herself up very small behind an old blue boat on the beach. If only Miguel would return and take her away! But there wasn't a fishing boat in sight. She clenched her fists and shook them in a paroxysm of hatred. Yes, she hated, she hated, she hated Richard! She bit her lips, she clenched her whole body, she burned and shook with hatred of him. He would kiss her, he would make love to her, and then reject her for that ugly, wicked, horrible woman, that sanely, ambitiously, criminally evil woman. And if he could love her he must be like that too!

Fretfully she began digging with her hands in the wet sand as if she meant to inter the corpse of her love there.

Oh, if Miguel would only come! She waited, crouched behind the boat, for seething, unthinking hours. She wondered a little at the sea. There must have been a storm in the night. It was

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strange to see it shrugging those huge smooth billowy shoulders in the calm afternoon. On the sea wall by the narrow entrance to the inner harbor basin, she could see the women collecting, looking out under their hands to the horizon. Little black specks were beginning to appear out there, and rapidly growing. Thank God, his God, the boats were coming. She climbed up the steps to the top of the wall. A worried woman told her how dangerous it was for the boats to enter this narrow walled passage when the sea pushed so heavily with the high tide. Unless the man at the tiller had great skill and luck, a wave might dash the boat to pieces against the wall. It had happened; it might happen again.

The boats gathered outside, waiting for the chance to enter. They rolled and rose, little black shells in the vast, heaving, opalescent sea. Finally one detached itself from the group and shot forward on the crest of a wave. A Breton boat, the crew in red, fish in open boxes glistening on the deck. With terrible swiftness the wave shot them into the gullet, but straight, not against the wall. Everybody sighed with relieved tension. Christine could have slain a man in golf clothes who stood by, nodding his head

complacently and smiling as if it were all a theater performance arranged for his benefit. And then her attention was riveted on another boat. Was this Miguel's? No; the crew was mixed blue and red, both Basque and Breton, and his would be all Basque. Clever fellows, these, they darted in when there

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was a lull between two waves. The next had bad luck. Just as it entered, hoping to be quicker than the coming wave, it was caught and flung obliquely over towards the wall. The crew swayed, the man at the tiller was shaken off his feet, the little launch was helpless, the women screamed and then the wave rolled back from the wall, carrying with it the boat before it had struck. They reeled into the harbor basin safely.

But it was not Miguel. It never for a moment entered Christine's mind that his boat could be lost. She half felt that his power extended to the waters. Her confidence was rewarded. The St. Michel appeared at the entrance, the only boat carrying masts. She had scarcely time to look at the tall crew, contemptuous of danger to the point of carelessly lighting their cigarettes. She saw that Miguel was steering and that a sudden wave rose out of the pearly lull, high, foaming, cruel—a terrible green onslaught. She was so near she could see that not a muscle moved in his face, the line of his cheek was like bronze, his eyes a narrow black line, his grip on the tiller so strong that he held the boat true and clear of the wall in spite of the weighty, rushing wave. Not a man of his crew even looked at the danger they had escaped, nor changed expression when they glided gracefully into the quiet basin.

Christine ran quickly around to the piers. Here all was shouting confusion, bidding and bickering, men handing up their shining catch in large shallow boxes. Miguel was not in sight,

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but she saw his crew, true Basques, handsome with a hard, definite, male beauty. High cheekbones, flat cheeks, square jaws, long straight noses, red and bronzed in color, long, lean, agile bodies, all like Miguel without his radiance—all dark, clean-shaved, all in blue scaly jeans, all with the little skull-cap of a beret giving them a curious look of monks of the sea. The Bretons were different, big, hulking, formless fellows, blond and red-haired, with droopy mustaches and wide-visored reckless caps. The St.

Michel ducked against one of the Breton boats, and immediately there was the making of a quarrel. The men in red and the men in blue began to curse each other out, to shake threatening fists. But out of the depths of the little vessel Miguel suddenly appeared, looked around, spoke briefly, and his men turned deaf and quiet, made the boat fast and began handing up the catch.

The sun rifted through the clouds, late, liquid-yellow sunshine on the harbor and the old houses. The water danced in blue and gold, and gleamed with all the colors suddenly revealed about, the orange, crimson, purple, many-patched jeans of the Bretons, the intense varying indigos of the Basques, the white and pink and yellow houses, and the fishes full of silver glints, stiff, slim, dagger-shaped, so many shining silver daggers. Christine toyed with the appealing idea of stabbing Madame, then she turned to look at the town as Miguel was paying no attention to her.

The sun was gilding the long slanting roofs,

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the low plantains, the tower of the church, rising up grim and square, strong in the faith. But it shone with equal splendor on two people coming towards the wharf—Richard and Madame.

The girl stood still, her blood chilling, not knowing where to run, being as near as she could get to her only protector. She hoped they might not see her, the sun was in their eyes, and if they did, they might not recognize her in those clothes.

Madame stopped and pointed back and Richard returned to the town as if for something they had forgotten. From behind Madame the little black dog ran out and came straight at Christine, triumphantly yapping as if it had found her. In a second it was snapping at her ankles. She kicked it, and turned to call to Miguel, but Madame already had hold of her arm. She heard herself violently addressed. She closed her eyes not to see the furious yellow face, but she had to listen.

“Oh, so you’re on the streets, are you? I expected that! Now, you clear out of here, or I’ll have the French police arrest you and put you in the kind of house where you belong. Clear out, now!”

A little crowd was collecting around them, eager to watch a well-dressed lady quarreling with a girl of the people, but they fell away when Miguel strode up, followed by two sailors as tall as himself. His eyes were flashing, and his mouth a determined line. The black dog

stopped barking and took refuge behind its mistress, shaking with fear. She immediately let go of Christine and began to walk away, but not before Miguel had said a few emphatic words to her. Then he spoke to his companions, and the two big fellows sauntered after her, as if they were going in that direction. She saw them, and almost ran towards a taxi, leaped into it, stopped it a minute later to pick up Richard, who was just coming back, and then drove off at top speed.

Miguel laughed. "I offered her a free escort to the treasure, but she didn't want it. And if that were your Richard, he seemed willing enough to go with her. But he may not have seen you."

"I don't care whether he did or not," Christine said hotly. "Leave him out of account, but don't let her escape!"

"She won't stop between here and her castle," Miguel said thoughtfully, "and yet she won't escape. We've set a trap—I must get back tonight."

He was interrupted by a fearful clamor. While he was talking to Christine, his cabin-boy had renewed the debate with the crew of the Breton boat all by himself, and was now twisting and kicking on the ground with five or six huge red fellows on top of him. Miguel gave one bound and was in the midst of it, dealing such deft and vigorous blows that he soon had the boy extricated and placed behind himself and a wall. The

Bretons hurled themselves at him, reënforced by comrades, but Miguel leaped, struck, and literally flailed them with his long sinewy arms so that they were driven off down the square as if they had been a flock of frightened animals. In the midst of the combat, his own crew had arrived, but he ordered them to stand aside, and they obeyed him, although they were quivering with the lust for battle. Not even the heroic physical strength of Miguel impressed Christine so much as his ability to immobilize those stout fellows panting to be in the fight with a single sharp command. And yet she was curiously, unreasoningly thrilled by the swift, swirling blows, the reckless courage. To the bored eye it might be only a sailor's brawl, but to her it seemed as if of a sudden she had been in the age of god-like heroes. It was mere physical courage, to be sure, and yet, it was—courage.

She ran to put the head of the little “mousse” in her lap. He was unconscious, bleeding. Her whole being palpitated at the sight of Miguel striding back to her, taller, straighter, supernaturally dominant in the dim blue twilight. He spoke to one of his crew, who picked up the boy gently and carried him away.

“He is coming with us,” he explained to Christine. “For his sake we shall have to take the train part of the way to get there quickly. He’s not badly hurt, but he needs care.”

They took the train, Miguel entering it reluctantly, like a wild animal going into a cage,

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and after hours of travel in a dark, third-class carriage, they got off in the hills. Christine waited at the lonely station with the half-conscious boy, while Miguel went off, soon returning with an ox-cart and a horse. He placed the boy in the cart, told the driver to take him to the farm Miguelchenborda, and mounted the horse himself. Christine started irresolutely towards the cart, but he lifted her on the horse in front of him.

They rode off. It was a moonlight night, one of those incredible nights of the Pyrenees where the moonlight is like a thick, shining silver fluid poured on the white farms with the little yellow windows, on the rocks, the waters, the trees, all framed in shadows of blue-black softness. They rode along lonely mountain tracks. Miguel had thrown his cape around Christine. She settled close to him, held by his arm, hearing the strong, steady beat of his heart. He smelled of tar and fish and salt and seaweed, and she breathed it as if it were a perfume more delicious than the sweet odor of honeysuckle that breathed from the hedges. It was a maddening, an intoxicating night, and she wondered why his face was so sad and stern.

He held her as he might have held a package, she thought resentfully, and yet she settled still closer to him when they began to ride through a pass guarded by huge shadowy, shouldering mountain spurs. Down below them a black water ran, rushing now and then in blue-white, brilliant

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stretches. She was frightened by the dim size, the overweening dark bulk of the hills, the stony wildness, the ghostly white water. To change his set expression, to make him say something, she spoke.

“This is better than the train.”

He started, as if torn out of a dream, then he bent his head and kissed her, as naturally as if he were calming a child. She affected not to notice it, and he said, “Yes, but the train will win!”

“What do you mean?” she asked, although she thought she knew.

“I mean,” he said, “that I was wise not to look for my successor. I ought to wear black always; the days of my kingdom are over. There are a few, a few faithful left, but no novices to take their places. I have forbidden them to bring the children. What is the good? The train will soon have won; it is far stronger than the Christians, even if the curé of Arraldia will be the means to my death.—But I see that very dimly—there is a shape like yours in it, and a red fire, but it may be something from the past. And what does it matter, if the machines have won?”

“I don’t understand,” she whispered humbly. He seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to her and an uncanny shiver ran down her back, he seemed so strange, so detached.

Again he pulled himself back to her with an effort. “It is hard to explain—but you could understand. Last night, out on the sea, fighting with the storm, I heard the men singing—music-hall

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songs. I heard them talk when we rested—talk about the cinema where they had been. In the old days they would have been singing their own songs, they would have been dancing, living first-hand.—Not long ago. I saw one of my festivals, it has a Christian name now, but it was always mine, and it was sickening—there were big auto-busses full of sightseers to gape at them.”

“I know!” she exclaimed, “but—why do you say ‘my’ and ‘mine’? You are Miguel Duhalde, aren’t you?”

He rubbed his eyes and sighed, “Oh, yes, and yet—sometimes I am not sure. I have inherited strange things. If only my foster father had not had to die before he had taught me everything. Now I only know that although I am Miguel Duhalde, farmer and fisher, yet I am too the last of a line of priests of an old religion, and sometimes I must incarnate the god—if only I knew how far! If I don’t carry it through to the end, will they obey me like a god or a devil?”

They were riding down into the valley that held the entrance to the grotto. “Why is your boat called the St. Michel?” Christine ventured. “I thought he was the Devil’s adversary, the Christian champion?”

“Oh,” he answered, “the Christian priests were clever, they took the birthday of the sun, the winter solstice, and made it the birthday of their god, and they took our god in his shining armor fighting darkness and evil, and called him their

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St. Michael, but he is still ours. Our god has many incarnations. We have always explained to our people that they could go to the Christian church with a good conscience, it was only part of ours. Some of their priests belonged to us and suffered martyrdom for us. All the symbols of their church are ours—the sun, the moon, the stars, and even the cross is only the circle of the sun, of eternity, but drawn differently, with the two diameters crossing. Our god descends into the darkness of winter and is resurrected in spring. I will show you soon in the treasure-house how many shapes he has.”

Christine thought, does he really believe that the sun is a god, and as in answer, he said:

“No, but the sun is the best expression of his divine energy that we can feel. It is the best symbol we have—but why do I tell you this, when you don’t believe in anything!”

“But I want to,” she insisted eagerly. “I want more than anything to believe in something—especially if it is what you believe,” she added shyly, her heart beating faster at the thought that he might know she was reaching out to him.

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CHAPTER TEN

NOW they were at the grotto. He lifted her off the horse. The moon made a white path across the black lake under the vaulted rocks; they passed along its rim on a little ledge, and then they were in the complete night of the great hall and the rough galleries. But Miguel went forward with sure step as if he could see in the dark, and she went with him, holding his hand like a child. His serene confidence flowed into her, and at that moment she thought she loved him.

She repeated to herself that she loved him when she had thrown herself on the bed of her room in the inner house, worn out with the day. She had chosen a classic room where steps went down to a beautifully proportioned bath, old as Rome; and tired as she was she got up to let the water flow into it. She bathed, brushed out her bright hair, and put on a long white robe of heavy old silk, and sat on the bed, her temples throbbing. He might come. He might have guessed that she wanted him that night, that there was no one in the world whom she adored as she did him, her hero, her god!

She waited tensely, but there was no sound in the rock house, until finally she thought she heard music far off. She gathered the robe about her and went out into the mysterious opaline light of the gallery. In her bare feet she walked towards the music, a string instrument, sad, sleepy,

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passionate. There was a door ajar at the end of a side gallery. Softly she stole to it.

She saw a large vaulted room, lost in shadows at the back and empty except for a cushioned bench along the near wall. Here sat Miguel, his handsome limbs half out of a red silk gown. He was playing a long, strange, primitive guitar, the notes flowing like moonlit water from it.

Close to him lay Catalin, her dark hair coiling down over the sheer white transparency of her tunic. They were a vivid and lovely sight, but to Christine the fact that they were together overshadowed the beauty. She rapidly told herself that Miguel had never made any secret of his attitude toward love, in fact he believed it his duty, in some way religious, to satisfy as many women as possible, but while she had accepted that theoretically she revolted from the actuality. All her desire for him suddenly sank. And

yet she wasn't jealous. Nor did she resent him. He was still handsome as an archaic god, still magnificent, still radiantly commanding, but she did not want him. She drew a long breath, half relief, and looked away from them, towards the back of the room where two girls were languorously dancing—Lisalda and Marichu. They shared him too, of course, and why not? How lovely they were, swaying and bending, their bodies lithe undulating lines under the thin, bright shawls that glistened about them, framing their white bodies in the twilight of the room.

Behind them seemed to stretch out not the

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room now, but a high and vaulted night; and, Christine could not believe her eyes, other dancers were surging out of it. At least there was a pale blur melting in and out of the shadows, here and there a clearer, more visible gesture, an actual arm emerging, the swirl of a drapery.

She looked at Miguel; had he seen her? No, except for his fingers moving over the strings he was as immobile as a statue, his face chiseled in bronze, as narrowly intent on the phantom dancers as he had been when he steered his boat through the wave. Catalin's eyes were closed, her head on his shoulder. Lisalda and Marichu seemed to be unaware of the shadowy host behind them, and Christine began to think she was dreaming on her feet.

Then a figure detached itself in human entirety from the misty blur, and glided forward, real, tangible, fair hair shining and a white arm sweeping over its head. The face was dimmed, like the image in an old mirror, and yet—and yet, Christine stiffened in tension. She knew that face.—It was her own! She cried out in bitter fear.

Miguel dropped his guitar and rushed to the door. All the shadows instantly vanished. He lifted up the girl, who lay in a heap on the threshold, and carried her back to her room. As in the days of her illness, he and Catalin put her to bed, covered her, soothed her; Catalin saying she was in a fever because she raved about dancing shadows. She offered to sit by her all night, but

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Miguel bade her go and sat down himself by Christine's bedside, holding her hand in his strong reassuring grasp.

“My poor little Christine, my poor little soul,” he said, “you must forgive me for having drawn you to come to see that!”

“Then it was real,” she trembled.

“No, no!” he insisted, “and I had not even thought you would be able to see it, although I needed your presence. But they were shadows. You see, you must be able to see, that nothing happens without leaving a trace. There is a memory, a world-memory, which holds all that has ever happened. But it isn’t like something printed in a book, it is like a vast, deep, airy ocean where everything is kept, all the shapes, all the words, all the actions that have taken place in time and space. And you know how a song or a flower or even ordinary things can suddenly bring back what was lost in your memory. So with this world reservoir. If you can find even one of the parts in a scene or an action then all the other shapes that were with it will come rushing to it out of the great memory and take their former places, and reenact the past. But the power of the will to make them come must be there too. I have that. I knew that once a woman from our cult in Scotland had come to us and had made a prophecy that through one of her descendants the last priest of the rock house should be freed from a terrible uncertainty. I

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had tried often to recall her shape, I had even indistinctly seen it, and when I first saw you I was haunted by the feeling that you resembled her. Tonight I concentrated all my will on seeing her again, and, with your presence to aid me, I saw her clearly.—But remember, it was only a shadow. A shadow resurrected from time, cast on time, and gone back into time. For me the rock house is full of such shadows, far too terrible for you to see, though I had meant to show you some.—You are half Scotch, you said!”

Christine nodded, calmed by his voice and presence. “Quarter Scotch. My mother’s mother was descended from Bothwell. I only know that she was called ‘godless,’ and I have heard that one of the Bothwells was tried and burnt on the charge of dealings with the—Devil!”

“They were faithful in Scotland, yes, faithful into the fire.” He rested his head in his hands.

“I should like to see more of the past,” Christine begged.

He looked up and frowned. “You little know what you are asking. If I am not insane with what I have seen, if I can still live here, it is because I

am hardened. But you—!”

“After the week when I lay waiting for Madame and Necato to butcher me, I am not so soft,” she declared. “I screamed to-night only because I didn’t understand. Now that I know they were only shadows—”

“Now you will go to sleep,” he said and lightly touched her forehead. Then he left, and she wondered

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drowsily if it were all illusion, if he had, in some way, hypnotized her into seeing what he thought he saw, had transferred his imaginings to her mind, and then she fell asleep with the blessed word telepathy buzzing in her head.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

RICHARD HOLMODY could not understand why Lydia was in so much of a hurry to get away from the charming town by the sea where they had gone to spend a leisurely day. But she was imperiously exigent, and he had too often gone up against her wishes in vain to want a battle on an unimportant issue. Still, to maintain a modicum of dignity, he decided not to talk on the way back. Her gaze being steadily fixed on the mountains as if they could not drive there too quickly, he had a chance to reflect on the course of events.

After having resolutely shut the window that let in the light of Christine Tancrede on his soul, he had had at last to face the fact that it would not stay shut. And, winged with the joyous thrill of this fact, he had at once started for the Castle Gorostegui.

Could it be that after the experience which had seared and bound him forever, he might still feel at least a sort of love? Could this girl carry her lovely daring youth, her fresh companionable mind, her translucent sincerity to him, even though she knew him to be mortgaged?

That he was mortgaged he never doubted. When he was a poor, shabby, outcast reporter in London, Lydia had bent down from her height and rescued him from the grime and tedium, had confided her silken, magnetic self to him, had risked her honor to make him happy. And

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he had loved her as he was afraid he never could love again, with the self-immolating, entire, fantastic devotion of a very young man for an older woman, of a page for a queen. Oh, he had been romantic! He had begged her to leave everything, to come with him to some idyllic refuge, but it was she who had taught him better. Although she loved him, although she would have given all her riches up just to be with him, yet she showed him that it would not be right to build their happiness on the unhappiness of her fat broker husband. And when the broker died of an illness that had wasted him to the bones, it was she who had finally had the strength to break with him, Richard, to send him away from her. In her unselfishness she would not consent that he should bind his youth to her age, no matter how much he stormed and prayed and threatened to kill himself.

Perhaps she had been right. At any rate he had suffered so much that finally his heart had seemed to him to be cold ashes with only the spark in it of being loyal to her, vowed to her, no matter what she did, even when she so inexplicably married that young Basque. He had forced himself to be friendly to Gorostegui, he had even liked him after a while, the man was so sturdy and simple. He had felt sorry when he heard the news of Gorostegui's mental malady; he had even in a dim way dreaded that Lydia might be a widow once more. In spite of his doctrine of loyalty, he could not imagine himself marrying Lydia now,

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Not because she was so much older and beginning to look her age, no, it was more because all those high and final emotions were dead in him.

He was rather glad that this truly preposterous aunt of his had discovered him; now that he had persuaded her she couldn't patronize him financially. But he brought her along whenever he had to meet Lydia, with the unexpressed feeling that she was a protection. Mrs. Watts was at the castle now, chirping and enthusiastic, capturing Max every evening and reading Andersen's fairy tales to him, while the boy lay staring at her with big black malicious eyes.

Richard shuddered a little when he thought of Max. Decidedly a morbid boy. But Lydia was a doting mother, she would not send him away, especially now that she had Gorostegui in a sanitarium. On the whole he was just as glad that he could not be permitted to go and see the poor fellow.

All was quiet and idyllic at the castle now, they had new servants brought from the north; there was comfort, even luxury, but the reason for his visit was absent.

There was no Christine Tancrede. When, immediately on his arrival, he had asked for her, Lydia had been greatly surprised. Why, she had written to him long ago that Miss Tancrede had gone back to her relatives in England, at least she said she was going to, but Lydia doubted it. The fact was, Lydia's hands elaborated her words, Miss Tancrede had behaved, well, not exactly as

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a young lady should, who was around an impressionable and growing boy like Max. She had had to ask her to leave, she had paid her well, but Miss

Tancrede had been rude, very rude, and had left without giving any address. Lydia sighed as she told this, and Mrs. Watts sighed on hearing it, shaking her venerable cropped head, and opining that this was exactly the way she had expected the girl to behave, a girl full of revengeful sentiments and who did not believe in the ALL-GOOD.

Richard did not doubt in the least that those two strong characters might have had a clash, and that it might have been on account of Max, though not in the way the fond mother interpreted it. But he was darkly overcast to find she was not there. He felt flat, old, disappointed. He refused to go on excursions in the beautiful spring weather with Mrs. Watts. Instead he lay in the park and read, and once in a while, surreptitiously, he sat in the room that had been Christine's. He kept hoping a clew would turn up. Lydia was not eager about leaving the castle either; she and her horrible old housekeeper were forever concocting things out of herbs in the laboratory.

This day Richard had been amazed when she asked him to go to town with her, and quite bewildered at the fantastic plan she developed to him on their way in.

She had learned, she said, in an underground manner, that in one of the mountains a treasure

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was hidden, a real, glorious old-fashioned treasure, and she knew that on a certain night it would be left unguarded by the robbers and smugglers who had accumulated it. She knew this through Necato, who had it from her gypsy relatives, friends of members of the band who were dissatisfied with the chief. Now, in one part of the town by the sea, there was a colony of gypsies, brave fellows, known to Necato, who would help if they were given a little advance encouragement. But she did not expect a fight. She knew for certain that the smugglers would be absent; it was only a matter of penetrating into their hiding-place, and that she could do if she really put her mind on it. Richard was to come along on the expedition. But she would interview the gypsies alone.

And so she had done, going into crumbling stone huts as dark and damp as the Middle Ages, while Richard loitered in the picturesque streets. There he had had a glimpse of a girl which troubled him, she was so like Christine, although she was evidently a girl of the people. He saw her as she was looking over a garden fence, laughing at the hens. But Lydia had come along almost immediately and had taken him away to look at a

jeweler's shop. The thing that puzzled him most was that he thought he had seen Lydia talking to the same girl down by the wharf, just before she came running and practically forced him to jump into the motor that was now so rapidly going over the many miles to the castle.

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He wanted more than once to stop it, to make some excuse for getting back to the town, but his old youthful fear of Lydia's displeasure prevented him. He could only promise himself no longer to despair of Christine. He would ask even more insistently at the post-office in Arraldia if there were no clues to her address. He would try to find out once more where that school-mistress, to whom Christine had once introduced him, had gone for her spring holidays. And surely she must soon be coming back. He would go to the village early the next morning.

Dark as it was, he jumped out when they reached the castle and announced to Lydia that he meant to take a walk. He wanted to be alone, to have time to think. Lydia looked after him, smiling. She knew he was vexed, but she knew, or thought she knew, that she could easily soothe him. In fact, although before she had considered his persistent fidelity rather a persistent nuisance, she was beginning to see that it could be turned to account.

She was now definitely more than middle-aged; no candle-light optimism could disguise the wrinkles; and, in spite of all the experiments carried out by herself and Necato, they had found no tonic of youth for her. Well, it stood to reason that young blood would have been the only thing, regular as well as occult science recommended it, had she not just seen a large advertisement in a Paris American paper about the transfusion of blood as a means to rejuvenation?

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But that little selfish minx of a Miss Tancrede had ruined all, and it was too dangerous to avail oneself of a stray child as Necato kept proposing.

Suppose then that she faced the cold fact of her dead youth. Who would be her next husband when Pacheco Gorostegui was dead? She had him well locked up now, in a padded room in the ruined part of the castle, and any doctor would have certified that he was stark, raving mad. It might perhaps be wise to have that done soon. It would be easy, there were no Gorostegui

relatives left in Arraldia, no family council would be necessary, and after this he could just quietly die.

And then Richard? Why not Richard? He had a good position now, he was somebody, and he was hers for the taking. He did not have much money, that was true, though she was beginning to wonder if this new aunt of his were a golden goose. Those pearls might be real.

Lydia's own fortune had diminished greatly since she made those experiments that called for so many precious stones to be dissolved. But there was a fortune within reach, perhaps an illimitable one, if Necato knew anything at all. The fabulous treasure of the inner house. She had been impressed once by the lordly manners and supposed secret powers of that man they called the Devil, but surely he was only a superstitious country lout, that Miguel Duhalde!—She never for a moment admitted to herself that once her whole eager striving had been to find favor with

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Miguel Duhalde. She overlooked the fact that this very day in the town she had fled terror-stricken from him. She explained it on the grounds that she had been hurrying back to perfect her plans. Necato had had certain information that the next night Miguel and his men were to be at a festival held in a mountain grotto in Spain. She meant to try the coup then. Six stout gypsies would follow her, and Richard might be of some use. Necato was coming, but although she was as strong as a man she would be of little help. She would collapse in superstitious terror the instant they approached the curse-guarded treasure house.

Lydia laughed and hummed a little air to herself. She could deal in counter-curses.

There was a knock at her door. Before she had time to answer, in burst Mrs. Watts.

"Dear Countess," Mrs. Watts never omitted the title if it could possibly be stuffed in, "*Dear Countess*, you will excuse me for breaking in on your precious time?"

Lydia nodded and smiled steadily and graciously, thinking that if she were to take up with Richard she must manage to suppress this large, odious cheerfulness. Max was getting to the point where he was sure to explode into something sensational, she had better look out.

Meanwhile Mrs. Watts sat down with an embarrassed yet beaming air. "Dear Countess, you won't mind if I speak frankly to you about Max? I

know, oh, you don't have to explain to me that

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he is a difficult child, and with all those wonderful scientific experiments you are conducting you naturally haven't had a great deal of time for him. And sometimes parents are the last to see some simple thing that is the matter, aren't they? Now don't be offended, do believe that I have the very best intention in the world when I say that I think the whole matter with poor Max is one thing. One thing!—He hasn't had any religious instruction.”

Lydia, continuing to smile, made an apologetic gesture and shrugged her shoulders. Mrs. Watts fairly melted into tact and good-nature.

“Of course I don't mean in the orthodox sense! No, no. I don't know what your beliefs are, but I am sure we can all agree that the universe is an emanation of the all-good, and of course, this being so, evil is only an illusion. Now if you would only let me teach Max about the all-good, it would change his whole life. It's just because he doesn't know about it that he put a snake in my room the other night, and a toad in my bed, and a cactus on my chair. Now don't think for one moment that I mind that! Oh, no! Why, boys will be boys, and they will play those tricks on their old aunties—you know I have told him that I am his old auntie, but,” here she leaned forward with an expression of real grief on her nice plump face in which the wrinkles of the old aunt struggled with the hair and paint of the flapper, “but, dear Countess, the thing I mind, and which you surely don't

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know, is that he chases birds in the park with all sorts of snares and when he catches them, he—he tortures them! And I simply couldn't tell you what I stopped him from doing to a cat! Oh, no!” She shuddered with pain, but then she remembered to be cheerful. “Dear Countess, won't you let me teach him about the ALL-GOOD?”

Lydia got up. She restrained herself with difficulty from treating Mrs. Watts to some of the epithets which Whitechapel reserves for meddlers and which always surged up from her childhood whenever she got really angry. But instead she managed to look grieved and grateful. After all, it was disgusting of Max to do those things.

“Do what you can, dear Mrs. Watts,” she smiled. “There is nothing I can say except agree with you and beg you to remember that he is a very

difficult, half-sick child.”

Mrs. Watts departed radiant. She now had a soul to save. In spite of her firm faith that she loved all children, she needed an extra bit of incentive to love Max. Not that she wanted to interfere with his individual development. She knew that children had a right to lead their own lives as well as adults, but perhaps he could be induced to lead it in a slightly different direction.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE next day Richard Holmody leaned over the grimy desk of the Arraldia post-office, focussing all he had of pleading intensity on the sour-faced, ink-stained post-mistress, asking her again if she could give him the least little clew to Miss Tancrede's address. She thawed out at last under his humble smile, and volunteered that Mademoiselle from the castle had once in a while been seen with the village school-teacher, who would return to-morrow from her spring holidays, and whose house she would be willing to show him.

He spent the day tramping the fields, and in the evening he tried with infinite caution to question Lydia again about Christine. However she only told him again of Miss Tancrede's ungrateful departure. She dismissed the subject with haughty contempt. Then she insisted on playing to him, and he had to sit there. The music seemed a metallic prison.

In the morning he ran to the village. He arrived at the right time, as the school children were storming home for their midday meal; and he met the slim dark young woman at her own little white house. He reminded her that he had once met her with Miss Tancrede, and he saw with joy that her face lit up. She invited him in, called her old mother to sit by with her knitting, and Richard plunged at once into a

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confession of his extreme anxiety to get news of Miss Tancrede. Could it be that Mademoiselle had any idea?

Mademoiselle had no definite idea. Her acquaintance with Miss Tancrede had been brief. But she had liked her. Very much. She had even been deeply worried by the many ugly rumors in the village about Miss Tancrede's disappearance. It had preyed on her mind that she ought to try to find some relative or friend of the girl, that she ought to tell them. And yet—Monsieur himself would think her absurd if she were to repeat the fantastic gossip of these Basques!—Monsieur was perhaps a friend also of Madame de Gorostegui?

He was much more a friend of Miss Tancrede's, Richard assured her, begging her to tell him anything she had heard.

Oh, it was too incredible. In this day and age. The people were saying in the first place that Pacheco Gorostegui was not in any sanitarium but imprisoned in the castle by his wife and this Necato, and that both of them were—witches!

Mademoiselle lifted her eyebrows and began to expatiate on people who believed in witches, but Richard recalled her to Miss Tancrede.

Miss Tancrede? Well, the long and short of it was that the villagers believed the “witches” had done away with her for their own ends. Nobody had seen her leave the castle, but there were rumors that she had been sent away to some mountain cave to be made a sacrifice to the

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Devil! In any case it was odd that she had not left the castle by way of the station.

But the “Devil”! Richard begged for Mademoiselle’s own reasonable explanation of these mad rumors. Or would the curé know anything?

Mademoiselle made a most expressive gesture of disdain. The curé, indeed! He was an ignorant old tyrant, she could tell Monsieur that! The curé was the head and forefront of the superstition in the village that there was a man who incarnated the Devil, but it would be too long a story to explain these Basque quarrels. In any case, it had nothing to do with Miss Tancrede. She had once warned the girl not to go near a fight that was beginning in the village, a fight in which the faithful of the curé and the so-called devil-worshipers were mixed up; but Miss Tancrede had not come to any harm then. Undoubtedly there was nothing in the gossip, except the central fact of her unexplained disappearance.

Mademoiselle would beg Monsieur to excuse her, she had to eat her dinner and return to school, and she would ask him not to mention her name in connection with what he might do in this affair. Her life was difficult enough in a Basque village!

Richard promised, and returned to the castle by the longest way around.

He was disturbed more than he liked to admit to himself. Of course it was out of the question that Lydia had done anything of a criminal nature, but he was not so sure about Necato.

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For her he had always felt an invincible repugnance. She might well have been jealous of Christine and have done something to get her out of the

way. And could it be that Lydia had lied to him about Gorostegui? Hardly had he thought the brutal word before he began to weave excuses around its nakedness. Lydia knew he liked Gorostegui and would have felt badly to see him in that sad state. And perhaps she had thought it was better for him to be home than in a strange place. He must simply go to her and ask her directly about all those things.

But when he arrived at the castle, Lydia and Mrs. Watts and Max were all having tea, and he had to join them. There was no chance to ask intimate questions; so, by what he thought an exercise of great diplomacy, he got his aunt to take Max for a walk. Lydia forced the boy to go with a lightning look. They were alone.

It was warm blue twilight and the heady scent of flowers came through the tall open windows of the salon. Lydia went to the piano and played things that for long he had asked her to play in vain, music that had accompanied their first years of love. She played them with a fire and feeling that once would have enflamed him; now he felt only an uncomfortable embarrassment. He coughed a little. As if sensing that he was not absorbed, she left the piano and came swiftly to him. She sat down by him and put her arms around his neck. He trembled, it was the first time in years that she had touched him; but he

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trembled with a sort of chill apprehension. However, she took it for passion and tightened her hold, murmuring the pet names she had once given him.

He gently removed her arms, and took her hand. In the darkening room he could see only the great black eyes in the sharp ivory face. "Lydia," he began, clearing his throat, "Lydia, I must ask you very seriously to tell me the truth about your husband. Is he—" he was going to ask her if Gorostegui was still at the Sanitarium, but she interrupted.

"My poor dear boy, is that it? Still scrupulous, still full of conscience. You daren't respond until you know that I'm free. I have told you that he is incurably insane so that I am really morally free. But what you want to know and haven't the courage to ask me is whether he is likely to live long. Well, then, let me tell you that I have heard this very day that his death is a matter of hours. It is too late for me to go to him, even if he could recognize me. So, I shall be absolutely free for you. Yes, and more than free, if the plan I have made for to-night succeeds. We shall have an inestimable fortune, you and I—for I want you to share it with me—Dick!"

He let go her hand and walked about agitatedly. Heavens, she had misunderstood him, and he was letting her continue!

“Lydia,” he began again, determined to explain himself, but she cut him short again, imperiously.

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“Not another word, my dear. Don’t spoil everything! To-night I need all my will-power to carry through what I have to—afterwards when we are secure you can tell me everything—and believe me I know what you have suffered, and how bravely.—I suffered with you. We shall have time enough for each other, years and years. And now I shan’t see you until nine or ten o’clock, the gypsies will be here—”

“Lydia,” he interrupted, “about those gypsies. I don’t mind going on your little adventure at all, but tell me more about it. Is it really a smugglers’ cave we’re going to? For of course you know that we shan’t have any right to smuggled goods?”

She pulled his ear coquettishly. “Silly old conscience. Well, I can relieve it. It is not smuggled goods. I only said that because I wasn’t ready to tell you the whole long tale. But I can give you the main facts. You know, you’ve often laughed at me for it, that I am interested in what is called ‘occult’ history. I found out in my reading about it, that here in the Basque country they really once had a sort of devil-cult, and a very flourishing one, so much so that the government severely persecuted them out of it about three hundred years ago. At that time they used to meet in big public festivals of public worship; as many as twelve thousand of all classes met on a beach not far from here, to dance and eat and make love, and—to offer up gold and silver and precious stones to their priest whom

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they called the Devil. Well, by spying around, and by the aid of Necato, I’ve found out that there is still a little remnant of this cult left here; there is even a man called the Devil; and, still more important, the whole of the treasure from those old days is intact and hidden in this mountain cave where we’re going. Necato got the information from some follower of this man’s who seemed to think he is neglecting his obligations as ‘devil’ in some way. As far as I can make out from the old books, the priest of this cult was expected to let himself be burned or the incarnation of their god couldn’t be complete. But in any case that has nothing to do with us. The

present watcher of the treasure is far too young to take himself out of our way by self-immolation, but I know that he is going to be in Spain to-night.—It will be a good night, almost dark, there is only the new moon. Be sure to look at it over your right shoulder, Dick!”

She laughed, low and contented, as one who at last sees a happy goal, and Richard heard the faint rustle of her dress as she left the room.

He sat in the dark, his head in a whirl of contrary emotions. At first he reproached himself for being so inadequate, so apprehensively cold towards this woman to whom he had vowed his life, his entire devotion. But the next moment he raged because he hadn’t been able to put up to her what he really wanted to know, and he was filled with dreadful forebodings as to the fate of Christine.

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Lydia had told him to look at the moon over his right shoulder, an innocent remark, and yet it reminded him that she was indeed very superstitious. It was possible, it was perhaps not inconceivable that this monster of a Necato had worked on her credulity so that she had been inveigled into something. He would look around for himself in this castle, and at once.

Preoccupied as he was with the turmoil into which he had been thrown, he hardly noticed that Mrs. Watts and Max had hurried past the open window; but gradually it came to him that the boy had been saying in a voice unusually caressing that he wanted to show “auntie” a pet cat, such a nice, pretty cat, they could see it easily by his pocket flash light. She had only to come with him to a cellar in the old part of the castle. Mrs. Watts’s happy consent had come in fervent murmurs on the evening breeze.

Richard decided to try to find them, having his own suspicions of Max’s sudden good-nature. It was dark outside; but the slim new moon, which he deliberately looked at over his left shoulder, and the stars gave a faint light, and he soon found his direction by hearing a terrified meow and then a pitiful yowling. There was an open door in the old part, but he had to stumble in the blackness over debris, into *cul-de-sacs*. Now he heard the sounds, now he lost them, but at last they were quite close; and, although it was only the cry of an animal, there was such terrific agony in it that his blood turned cold.

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Under a door a light shone, he put his shoulder to it, burst it open.

It was a bare stone cellar, lit by the naked glare of a large flash light; and, tied to a pillar in the middle, he saw Mrs. Watts. Directly in front of her was Max, waving a blood-dripping knife over something he had nailed to a rough table, something red and formless from which the yowling came—a living, half-skinned cat.

Richard used no more than two seconds to leap on the boy and secure him firmly by the collar. Wresting the knife from him, he plunged it at once into the heart of the unfortunate animal, putting an end to its sufferings, and then he turned his attention to Mrs. Watts. The poor woman was livid and wild-eyed, she was silent only because she had a large handkerchief stuffed into her mouth. Richard snatched it out, and as Max was now beginning to scream, he gave himself the satisfaction first of giving him two tremendous boxes on the ears, and then of gagging him. Cutting the rope that still kept Mrs. Watts from sliding to the floor, he transferred it, too, to Max, securely lashing his feet and hands. Then he put his arms around his aunt.

“Poor Aunt Cynthia!”

She burst into tears, leaning on his shoulder, “Oh, Dick, Dick, he is not a child, he is a demon! Oh, you can’t imagine what he made me suffer!”

“If he touched you!”

“No, no, what he did was much worse, and he knew it, for he told me he had wanted to—to—

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do things to me, because he said I would be so nice and fat to *cut* in; but he had made up his mind, he said, that he would enjoy it more to watch my expression while he skinned a cat. Oh, Richard!—Oh, I feel so sad for his mother!”

At this a dry little cackle came from Max, who had just succeeded in removing the gag. Richard was on him in time to stuff it back before he began to scream. He left his aunt to support herself against the wall as best she might, then he questioned the boy, digging his fingers into the bony shoulders.

“Understand one thing, now, you hellish imp, that if you scream instead of answering my questions when I take out the handkerchief, then I am going to beat you until you will be like that cat over there! Understand!” And he was so angry, so full of loathing for the creature he was touching that his face frightened Max, who made himself small, inert, weak.

“What do you know about Miss Tancrede, where is she?” Richard demanded, shaking him like a rag. The handkerchief fell out of itself, and the answer came, meek and timid.

“I don’t know, oh, oh, don’t kill me, I will tell you everything I know, but really I don’t know about her, except that she was sent to the Devil in the grotto—there was a man who had a lot of people who danced outside a grotto, and they called him the Devil, and I heard Necato say they had. sent Miss Tancrede there.”

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“Is she—is she—dead?” the words almost stuck in Richard’s throat.

“No, I don’t think so.” Max looked like a guileless child with his large black eyes, red lips and face white in the electric flash light. “I heard mother and Necato say that she wouldn’t give them the blood mother needed to make herself young with; but they didn’t know what had been done with her, perhaps she was a prisoner in the place where they kept the treasure—”

“The treasure?” Richard cut in, suddenly connecting things.

Max smiled ingratiatingly, thinking he had appealed to cupidity. “Yes, there is a treasure, and if you promise not to hurt me I can find out from mother and Necato where it is, and then I’ll tell you.”

Richard did not hear him. Perhaps if he said nothing and simply went along with Lydia’s expedition to-night, perhaps he would find Christine.

But Lydia! Max had said that she, and Necato, together had sent Christine to this place. The pup was lying, of course. But just the same he would ask him some more questions. He gripped him hard again.

“Where is Monsieur de Gorostegui?”

Max slanted a dark glance at him, but finding the face as implacable as before he mentioned the treasure, he yielded. “Who? Pacheco? He is upstairs!”

Thinking he was being mocked, Richard shook

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the boy violently, and Max began to whimper, “I didn’t do it, why do you hurt me? It was mother who had him shut up there, with Necato to watch him, and when he dies we’ll all go to live in Paris, only”—here his face took on an expression of indescribable hatred—“I don’t want to go if she is going to marry you!”

“Don’t worry, she won’t,” said Richard grimly, then he considered a moment. After all, there was no better time to find out about Gorostegui. He gagged Max well and tightened his ropes. Mrs. Watts, flat against the wall, watched all her nephew’s movements, but when he took the flash light and begged her to wait patiently a little while until he could come back for her, she sobbed, “Oh, Richard, I shall die with fright if you leave me in the dark here—with him!”

“Oh, you will think about the all-good, Aunt Cynthia, and about Max’s relation to it,” Richard could not help saying; and, not heeding her protestations, he took the lamp and left to see what he might find, “upstairs.”

As a measure of precaution he took off his shoes, and sheltered the light with his hand. He proceeded cautiously up an ancient stair, but saw and heard nothing. Dirt, cobwebs, ruins and desolation. And then the flash light suddenly flared, flickered and went out. He was in complete, thick, prehistoric blackness. He almost decided to go back, but there were only a couple of rounds left to the top of the tower, and he must find out whether Max had lied.

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As he slowly fumbled his way up, he thought he heard a voice. Or was it the blood hammering in his ears? No, it was a voice, high, laughing. He stopped, not daring to go on, not daring to move. On the next floor a door was evidently half-open, and through it the voice came. He did not want to believe it, his soul revolted from believing it, but the voice was Lydia’s.

And she had told him she was going to He down in her room till the time of the expedition. Something tugged at the old, old roots in his heart. If she had lied to him about Gorostegui; if there were any truth at all in the strange stories about Christine, then he could uproot her out of himself; he could be a free man again. He had a right to try to find out if she had lied to him. And he listened.

Very soon he clenched his hands, digging his nails into his flesh. She was speaking to Gorostegui.

“No, Pacheco, the time has come to finish. I made you rich, I bought you a title, and you refused to do anything for me. You wouldn’t go to Paris. You wouldn’t learn, and you couldn’t learn, how to behave like a civilized human being. Because I had married you, you thought you could treat me as if you were the master. Boor! Brute! Do you remember the day

you beat my boy? You might better have lifted your hand to me, but you were afraid of that!”

A man’s voice, faint and broken, began to mumble, “Virgin of Lourdes, Virgin of Guadeloupe,

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Virgin of Pilar, protect me against the witch, save me from the witch!”

Then came Necato’s voice, deep and rough, “It is no use, Madame, no use at all. He calls on Them, whatever I do, and he has bribed Them. I told you he gave a gold chandelier to each of Them before you locked him in. They make a ring around him, I can feel it, I can feel it; he only suffers half the pain he should from the waxen image and the mirror of the moon. He would have been dead long ago if it weren’t for Them. It’s not my fault. You’d better have let me slip the knife into him, or a little tiny bit of the black powder!”

Lydia turned angry. “Silence, old fool! You and he are a pair with your witches and your virgins! And you’d like to have me kill him outright and see me in the hands of the gendarmes? No, thank you! But I’m through now! Yes, and with your promises too. The waxen image was going to do it and it didn’t; and the mirror of the moon was going to do it, and it didn’t! I tell you, you know nothing! I depended on you to save my strength and to rid me of this peasant; now I can spend myself to do it! I depended on you to get me the blood I needed from the Tancrede girl, and you bungled that in some way. If we had hid her here, as I wanted to, we could have quietly slit her veins, but you had your fool schemes—”

“Oh, Madame! Was it my fault if the Master would not let her be sacrificed, and was it my

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fault if he heard from her that Madame had spoken of the treasure—”

“Silence!” A foot stamped on the floor. “Silence! To-night you can redeem yourself by helping me find that treasure. And not a word out of your ugly mouth to Monsieur Holmody about anything. But first we’ll see about Pacheco. Where is your wax doll? Where is the cock?”

“Here, Madame, and every feather of him is black.”

Lydia’s voice sank. “Ninny, it is the will, my will, that does it, not the black feathers.” Then it rose again. “You see, Pacheco, open your eyes, you see that the cock is black, all black, we’ll draw a knife across its throat, so-

o-o! I consecrate thee to the Devil. Master, help us, give power to the waxen image, put Pacheco's life into it!—There, lick the nice red blood, my darling, lick it!"

And a brief, discreet, grateful bark proved that her little dog was obeying.

"Now, now, the small Spanish knife, give it to me. Here, Pacheco, you see the image of yourself, it is you, we have baptized it and made it you, and you know I have the power. Now, here is the knife, see it shine, it is sharp, sharp and pointed, Pacheco, look, look!"

There was an intensity in the voice which made Richard lean half-sick against the wall, and yet he could not but stand, cold and immobile, his whole strength in listening.

Gorostegui wavered, "Virgin of Lourdes, Virgin

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of Guadeloupe, Virgin of Pilar, aid me against Satan, aid me against the witch!"

And then Lydia, like a sudden electric shock: "Look! the knife into the heart of your image, of yourself!"

There was a moan, "Virgin of—Guade-lou—" and then the man's voice broke, trailed into absolute, awful silence.

Richard pressed his forehead against the cold stone. Was she mad, was he mad? He could not think, the rock on which he had built his life had crumbled. But in the confusion one clear idea arose, he must find Christine and save her, and to do that he must pretend he had heard nothing, he must go with this demon-woman to the place where the fabled treasure was and the "Master" to whom they had sent Christine.

"Give me water, Necato, it nearly kills me too," Lydia said, flatly, inertly. "Now he is surely done for. Leave him here for the present. Then get him somehow into the bedroom we prepared next to mine, and we'll say the Sanitarium sent him back late at night and that he suddenly died of heart failure, which is what I think he actually has had. But now there is no time to lose, massage me a little, and then we must start for the grotto."

Richard descended as quickly as he could. Now, what could he do with Max?

Fumbling about in the cellar, he managed to secure the boy and, by means of dire threats, to make him come along quietly. Terror lightened

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the feet of Mrs. Watts, and the three were able to proceed up to Richard's room before they were discovered.

Here Richard demanded a promise of silence from the cowering imp, and Max, fully persuaded that this man was dangerous to his dear life, promised anything. He even ate docilely of the dinner that was served to them in the room, and descended with Richard and Mrs. Watts, just as Lydia and Necato were entering the vestibule.

At that moment a servant announced that six men had arrived in an automobile and they said Madame was coming with them. Lydia motioned to Richard and he started forward. Then Max cried out that he wanted to come too, and his mother hesitated, it being almost physically impossible for her to say no to him. Richard was going to put in a strong objection, when he saw Mrs. Watts lift beseeching hands, her face gray with fear at the idea of being left alone in the castle with her tormentor.

And so they all clambered into the large shabby motor waiting outside. Lydia gave orders where to go, and how far they were to stop from the grotto so as not to give alarm. There was so little room in the car with the big, strong-smelling gypsies that she planted herself affectionately on Richard's lap. He felt as he had felt once when as a child he had seen a Hindu twisting snakes around his neck.

Snakes. Lydia was fond of them. This was

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one of the things about her which he had always had to put out of his mind. She had often boasted to him that as long as no one had broken her will power she could fondle the most dangerous vipers with perfect safety. And to prove it she had let mountain adders coil about her bare arms, laughingly assuring him that they knew her mind could never be commanded, and so they had to obey her.

Well, that strong and evil will of hers might still be unbroken, but his obedience, at any rate, had come to an end. He sat still, able to endure her nearness only because of one thing—something that stuck out of the pocket of her coat, an odd silk scarf he recognized as Christine's.

And they sped on in the soft warm night of the first of May.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN the hall of the shadows, where the Gothic vaults hewn in the rock lost themselves in darkness, and where there was no end wall but the black depths of the mountain itself, Christine entered with Miguel. Incessantly haunted by her glimpse of the phantom dancers, she had begged him again to reveal the past, to recall from out the world memory one of the great festivals of his cult. By a vague trembling light, two golden chairs shone, high, massive and twisted in strange carvings. Suns, moons, stars, curious animals and symbols were chiseled in them and set with brilliant stones. Each was surmounted by an image of the sun, a disk with rays going out like flaming swords. They were like Eastern thrones, heavy, and yet exquisite in workmanship, and they gleamed in the dim light, almost as if they gave out a radiance of their own.

Into one of them Miguel lifted Christine; when he touched her she felt it through all her veins, and then he leaped up on the other. He was clad like a barbaric prince, all in skins and cloth of gold studded with gems. But it was old, old, crumbling and tarnished, all that he wore; the gems shone as from among ruins. His face was half hidden by a helmet or headdress like the head of an animal with long curving horns, giving him the primitive mystery of Egyptian gods.

When they were both seated, facing the blackness

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of the mountain caves, he clapped his hands and a music began, a lilting, light, delicious tune of tambourine and flute. He took the girl's hand, his face concentrated in hard intensity; she felt a shock pass from him to her. Every nerve in her jumped, and then, gradually, slowly, voluptuously, relaxed. It was as if the sound of the elfin music, which she had heard before, but where, where, oh, at the procession of Arraldia, as if that music sang in her body—but here there was a procession, too; she could hear many, many light steps walking in time, dancing in time.

She was afraid to open her eyes, she wouldn't, she wouldn't, and then Miguel's hand pressed hers, as if to make her. She opened her eyes.

The hall of shadows was gone, the mountain was gone, she was gone herself, and yet she saw. At first, she thought she was hovering in ultimate

time and space, so vast, so wan, yet so radiant was the place before her; and then she saw it was an immensity of moon-lit beach. Palpable, silver light flooded the ever-extending sands that lay pale and shining in the dark-blue world of the mountains, two far rocky capes, the distant thundering sea.

First there was nothing, except that moon-cool radiance, and the blue endlessness, and a silence as if before creation; and then the tambourine and flute began again their sweet processional. Out of the mysterious light, figures thickened, hundreds, thousands of them, and still they were not enough to fill that vast expanse.

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They grew clearer, clearer, they were men, women, children, walking along, half dancing along in an undulating procession, out towards the edge of the sea, where the long white thundering rollers broke.

There, against that cosmic background, an altar was raised, where stood two gleaming thrones and in them sat figures. One of them was only a veiled slenderness, the other a tall man wearing on his head the horned head of a bull. He was clad in skins and in a golden tunic which glistened in the fire that suddenly flamed up from the altar, violating the soft effulgence of the moon. Above the altar, illuminated by the fire, gleamed a great bronze statue of a bull, carrying the sacred disk of the sun between his lyre-shaped horns.

A shout of adoration went up from the procession, and as they began to file past the altar and the thrones, they made obeisance before them, while everyone who could kneeled to kiss the attribute which hung carved in gold before the figure with the animal head. When they had all passed, to the same airy yet solemn music, they ranged themselves in an immense kneeling multitude before the altar, and a service commenced with music and singing, white and red-robed priests, choir-boys swinging golden censers before the altar, a scene of the wildest and super-best magnificence. The priests chanted and the people chanted back responses, then finally there was silence.

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The fire was dying, a silvery bell tinkled once, and everyone fell on his face, shaken, awe-struck, worshiping, for now the god was descending from his throne, and the white, slender, veiled girl he had chosen to be his queen was following him.

With a spark from the sacred fire he touched her once, sealing her to the sun; and then, in the absolute, unseeing, religious silence, he took her, in the name of the male sun-god whose high-priest and sacred incarnation at that moment he was.

The great mystery had been accomplished. In the summer to come the fields would give abundantly and the animals would be fertile.

When the silvery tinkle again sounded and the people lifted their faces, the golden thrones were empty. The sacred fire hidden in its ancient earthen shrine, the ceremonial part was over and the feast could begin.

A hundred fires sprang up under the moon, piles of brushwood had been ready for them, and the silence was changed into a mad hurly-burly of preparation. The smell of roasting meat arose, and people scrambled for wine and bread and silver vessels. White cloths were spread on impromptu tables. On the moonlit sands a banquet of abundance and luxury was provided; but the moonlight faded in the gold and scarlet of the fires, as the worshipful mood vanished in wine and eating.

When the tables had been cleared away, the

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dance began, quickened by music that flowed, bland and sensuous as Spanish wine, from twenty tribunes. Now it languished like the moonlight, now it whirled and leaped and flashed like the brushwood fires. And the thousands and thousands there, decked out in shimmering white and red and gold, sparkling and turning, beating tambourines and castagnettes, danced with an abandon, with a passionate lightness, with a fervor that knew itself to be religious, justified in obeying the singing in their veins.

There were mountaineers and there were mariners, there was town and there was country, there were robust, blooming girls, and dainty ladies with elegant gentlemen, masking their grandeur. There were even priests, old and young, sharing the dancing and the good cheer. In the beginning the different layers of society kept apart, but soon the heady music and the heady wine were mingling them in breathless, swirling rounds and rings.

Christine felt she was there, that she saw and understood it all, and yet as if she were looking in from another world. This was the sabbat then, this was the thing accursed and punished by a hundred-thousand stakes—how she longed to be really there, more than as a shadow gazing at a dream. She had felt as if fire flowed through her when the veiled queen followed the priest to the altar; and she, like the congregation, had prostrated herself

before the mystery. She had seen under the sacred bull's head, that the features

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of the priest, the swarthy, definite half-Egyptian features, were like Miguel's, and after his disappearance she sought him again in the multitudinous crowd.

She sought him, but she found herself, no longer floating as a vague and immaterialized thought, but as a living girl in rosy flesh and blood—short, flying skirts and vagrant hair, dancing a furious fandango with a tall young priest whose face, possibly out of regard for his soutane, was masked. As happily as if she were waking from sleep, she glided into the body of this girl, and now she knew nothing except the dance and the burning in her blood, and a dizzy perfect rhythm with her unknown partner whose dark, flashing eyes drew her nearer to him, and nearer.

The moon was setting in ardent yellow behind the black mountains, and the brushwood fires were sinking, flickering out because no one had time to tend them. The tambourines and flutes, the lutes and guitars still throbbed and raved melodiously, but now and then a musician deserted, and the others touched the strings distractedly. The deep, wild notes of the returning sea, the breakers of the rising tide, came closer, long white foaming streaks in the soft darkness. The dancers left the moistening sands. Two by two they whirled up into the billowing dunes that framed the beach, and sank down breathless among the odorous herbs.

The spice of thyme, the overpowering sweetness

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of night-violets and wild carnations enveloped Christine and the masked man in perfumed protest against the bodies that crushed them down. It was black night now. She felt him fling off his mask and seek her lips. Laughing, she pushed him away, and then a last vivid flame burst out from the embers smoldering near by. She lifted her head to look at him, and her laughter froze.

It was He, it was the dark, stern, regal face which, shadowed by the bull's head, she had saluted in passing the throne. He moved disguised among his worshipers. It was sacrilege to resist him, even in jest. Shuddering, she closed her eyes and lay still, waiting. A long burning hand

caressed her throat, her breast, her body quivered—and then it was as if she died, as if the life-force let go of her, leaving a cold and heavy clod.

She sat awake in the ancient golden chair, gazing about her in the hall of shadows, haggard and bewildered. Where was he? Who was she? Surely she had been dreaming, and yet it was all so clear to her still that she shivered with a touch of mystic terror as she looked at Miguel, seated beside her, apparently asleep, though his long, narrow eyes were open and staring. He must have flung her hand aside hard, for it was hurt as if it had been bruised against the side of the chair. His face contracted a couple of times, and then he turned to her with the steady calm of Miguel Duhalde.

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“It is tiring; you must rest,” but as he lifted her from the high seat he whispered, “Not even among the shadows, without your consent,” and she knew what he meant, while she tried, tried with her whole being to feel that only he mattered in the world, to feel as she had felt in the shadow-world, but her personality was no longer simple, naïve, credulously submissive; it was a tangle of doubts and pride and unbelief.

He set her down, looked at her quizzically. “You will soon see your Richard now. Madame Lydia is enlisting his aid in making a raid on the treasure house this very next night.”

“I know you will let nothing happen to him,” she said, and then, “Now I understand why twelve thousand persons come to the sabbat. How could any other religion have subdued it?”

He darkened. “You think it was pleasure only, and it is true we believe in the divine senses, but you have not seen what those pleasure-seekers could do for their religion—you would faint if I showed you!”

“I would not!” she protested, nettled by his tone.

He looked past her. “For my own sake, to come to know for sure what I ought to do, I need to see him.”

“To see whom?” she questioned timidly.

“Dominic d’Irاندatz, the priest whom you saw in the shadows, my ancestor who knew that he could say mass in the Christian church in the daytime and for our god at night, because all

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gods are one in the fire of the sun. He must have loved the Scotch girl who came to us, the one whose body you have, as I should make you love me—

if I had the time!”

He was pacing up and down the gloomy hall, frowning, and Christine, weary and relapsing into the pillows of the bench by the wall, strove against the thought that what she had seen was a picture of things in Miguel’s mind compelled into her mind by his undoubted power of hypnotism.

He had thrown off his fantastic robes and head-dress, and had flung a long red cape over his shoulders. He was superb and strange with his dark, angular, determined face, high cheek bones, strong columnar neck, his narrow, deep eyes close to the straight thick brows. She wished he would take her back, whether in dreams or some unknown reality, to those shadows where she could be again that remote, naïve, believing girl and he would be—Dominic d’Irlandatz, the priest whom it was sacrilege to resist, the living incarnation of sun.

Miguel stopped abruptly before her. “Follow me,” he ordered, and she followed him. Down through winding dark galleries they went, into the depths of the mountain. She took hold of his cape, it was so dark, and she felt timid, although he moved through the passages and helped her through narrow holes as if it were all in broad day. At last he stopped and she saw his hands moving on the rock wall. She saw

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the long, brown, sinewy hands, because they were as if outlined by faint rays of light, and under them the rock moved, slid aside, leaving a gaping hole.

“You have no faith,” he said, “and I ask myself if I have the right to take you into our sanctuary, because to me this is a sanctuary, even if it is not in the stronghold with the gold and jewels and the gods. There is nothing to see, and yet it means everything. We did not dare to put it with the treasure which may some day be rifled by greed, and so we put it here, apart. But come!”

A narrow passage widened into a rough cave, lit by the same mild opalescence as the inner house, and by this light Christine saw colored pictures on the walls, paintings of animals, strong and lifelike. Some of them she did not know, others she recognized as huge, shaggy-maned bison-bulls, and though half erased by time they still bulked vividly in red and black.

Wondering, she turned to Miguel.

“Our first ancestors, yours and mine, made these over twenty thousand years ago,” he said, “and though theirs was a primitive religion, yet this was their sacred place, and it is so sacred to us that we have put our holiest relics here.”

The girl looked around, but there was nothing to see except clumsy rusty iron instruments, wood and leather things, an ignoble junk heap.

Miguel saw her surprise. “When our people were tortured for the faith, pious hands gathered

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up the instruments and guarded them—even these!” He pointed to several thick and deeply charred stakes.

Christine shuddered; now she knew.

Miguel drew her down beside him on a bench, a horrible, stained squat iron bench with rings and leather straps.

He took her hand. “Whatever you see or hear, do not be afraid. You may see my form, but it will not be I. The shadows that sleep in the world memory will form their patterns again around these instruments, my mind will hold them together for a space, and then they will sleep again.”

Christine felt the thrill and tension of his touch, then her eyelids got leaden and she was aware of nothing until she seemed to be coming out of a sleep by hearing a nasal voice droning near her:

“Whereas the said Jeanne Dibassou hath confessed herself to be a witch, to have given herself to the Devil, to have renounced God, his holy saints, and holy baptism; to have been marked with the *sigillum diaboli* on the shoulder; to have had carnal knowledge of the Devil, and often to have attended the sabbat dances; and, whereas she hath moreover confessed that at the sabbat no proper food is eaten, but horrible stews made up of new-born infants, toads, vipers—”

“No! No!” the weak voice of a woman interrupted, but the nasal voice went droning on, “and at the said sabbat a most vile poisonous

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powder is given out by Satan, and with the said powder the said Jeanne Dibassou did poison the horse of—”

“It is a lie!” There was such despair in the voice that Christine made a supreme effort and opened her eyes.

It was the secular court sitting at the town hall of Bayonne.

She saw a smoky cellar room lit by the red fire in a brazier under a smith's bellows, and by two pale candles on a table at which sat three black-gowned gentlemen. One of them held in his hand a long yellow parchment; he was the clerk who had been reading. In the middle of the room was a squat wood and iron bench, and on it was strapped a young woman, barely clad in a rough chemise. Around her moved a couple of men in short leather jerkins, their sleeves rolled up, shiny tools in their belts.

At a sign from one of the black-gowned judges, the torturer bent down and screwed something in the bench and a terrible cry came from the woman; her bones were being stretched till they cracked. At another sign, he released her, and one of the judges came over to the bench.

"Do you still retract your confession?"

Only a groan came from the mangled body. The clerk recommenced droning: "—the said Jeanne Dibassou did poison the horse of Pierre Rieux and hath committed other crimes for which as well as for her great crime of divine

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lèse-majesté she is justly condemned to be tied to a stake and burned, but inasmuch as the said Jeanne hath renounced the Devil and all his works, she shall be strangled before the fire touches her."

The hangmen began to unstrap the white arms of the woman; when, suddenly charged with mysterious strength, she sat up and spoke firmly: "What I have said under the torture I do not know, but I retract it, all of it! If I renounced our Master in my pain, he will not hold it against me, for I do not renounce him now, being in my own mind, but cling to him and hope for eternal salvation through him. The sabbat is the true paradise, there is no evil in it, you put the evil words in my mouth while I was tortured!"

"Strike out—'that she shall be strangled before the fire touches her,' " ordered the judge phlegmatically, then crossed himself and muttered a prayer. "Next!" he commanded, while Jeanne Dibassou was being half dragged, half carried out.

The next was a young girl. Her black curly hair hung down in two long thick braids, framing a pure oval face of delicate cream and rose. In shy, flower-like charm, she stood poised and serene before the judges, answering their questions without hesitation. Being informed that unless

she told the whole truth, she would be tortured as Jeanne had been, she answered proudly that she had no reason for not telling the truth.

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“Let her be pricked for the mark, *sigillum diaboli*,” ordered the judge, his lower lip wetly red, his eyes gleaming and devouring the tender young thing.

A mean-faced old woman was called in and came up to the girl with a long thin awl, while the hangmen tried to pluck off her shift. But she wrapped it tight around her and cried, “Let no one touch me, not you, Atsona, traitress! I confess that I have the mark. Here, on my left shoulder, is the holy mark, and I am what you call a witch, and the Devil is my Master. I have been his since I was twelve, and I long to die for him.”

“There is no need to prick her, then,” the judge sighed. “Ah, to be so young and so hardened! Tell me, pretty one, since you know it so well, what is the sabbat like? Vile orgies, eh?”

“Why do you waste my time?” she said calmly. “I have confessed; I have earned the fire. Orgies I do not know. At the sabbat we make love openly and before all the world. It is all pleasure and joy and lovely music. It is paradise on earth and if we die for our Master we shall enjoy it forever.”

The judge leaned forward, quivering. “Who is your master other than the very Devil and your lover!”

She drew herself up haughtily, “He is our God, and he has honored me!”

The judge turned to the clerk: “Order the stakes to be raised at once before the church

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door. With her and the other and two more we shall have enough for this afternoon. Write: Marie de la Ralde, a confessed witch and mistress of Satan, to be burnt alive. Away with her!”

The girl’s face bloomed into a smile of such radiant joy, such shining triumph, that the beholders were almost frightened. When she had gone out, eagerly, with her jailer, the clerk whispered that it might be well to have holy water sprinkled about as doubtless the Evil One himself had been present so as to encourage the witch.

This was duly done, and the trio, looking nervously towards the dark corners, ordered two more prisoners to be brought, which would finish their

quota for the day.

The next were a boy and a man. The boy might have been sixteen; he seemed a young sailor. His whole attention was fixed, not on the judges or the bench of torture, but on his companion, a tall man, clad in a torn soutane, a grave, handsome man, with features that bore a strong, a startling resemblance to those of Miguel Duhalde. When his stern face relaxed long enough to give a smile to the boy, the latter ran forward to the judge. "Let me come first," he begged, but those were the only words the judge could get out of him. He listened to the usual questions as to whether he had denied his baptism, whether he had gone to the sabbat, whether he had committed abominations with

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Satan, without for a moment changing the serene expression of his round, boyish face or long, dark eyes, and he did not answer.

"The boot!" the judge ordered at last, exasperated. The hangmen approached, forced him down on the bench, and put on his foot the terrible Spanish boot, made to crush the flesh and bone.

The man in the soutane wrung his hands in agony as the instrument of torture tightened on the boy's foot. "Confess; say what they want you to," he cried, but the boy had already sunk into what resembled a sound sleep. Even after they had taken off the thing that had left him with a bloody mass instead of a foot and waked him with cold water, he seemed unaware that he had been hurt. Having the same questions put to him again, he spoke at last, but only to say, "Oh, why did you wake me! I was with the Master in Paradise!"

"Who is your Master; is he not the Devil?" the judge asked, and the boy answered joyously, "My Master is he whom you call the Devil."

The clerk whispered that as it was getting late, they had better accept that as a confession, and so it was duly recorded that Corneille Cambrue, a confessed follower of Satan, was to be burnt alive. He was carried out as if in an ecstatic trance.

"And now, Master Dominic d'Irandatz," said the judge, addressing the man in the soutane, "although you still have the unheard-of impudence

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to wear that garb, you know well that Holy Church has turned you and other black sheep over to us, to the secular arm, for punishment. I warn you

it will go hard with you unless you give us a full confession. At what age did you make your pact with Satan? When did you first begin the unspeakable sacrilege of saying the mass of our Lord in the daytime and the black mass of the Devil at midnight?"

Dominic d'Irandatz answered not a word, his soul seemed to be absent, he stood with folded arms like a calm bronze statue. He did not resist when the hangmen roughly tore off his clothes and stretched his fine, slim-flanked, broad-shouldered body on the bench, nor did he utter a sound while they tore and burned and crushed his flesh. He did not faint, nor move a muscle of his face; he was conscious, open-eyed and tranquil. The hangmen suddenly fell on their knees, crossed themselves and vowed to the judge that never in all their professional experience had such a thing happened to them, that he was the very Devil, for sure, or else that Satan was there invisible, preventing him from speaking.

The judge, although visibly shaken, reassured them. The Devil could not be present in a room where the judge was wearing, as he was, the precious relic of a hair of St. Peter's beard. But the Devil could give and certainly had given Dominic d'Irandatz the gift of taciturnity, and as this alone was proof of his guilt, no confession was necessary. Let him be burned with the other

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three, and at once. There were two hundred and ten of the same vermin waiting trial, and they couldn't be dispatched too quickly.

Christine came to consciousness in the cave with tears streaming down her face. When she saw Miguel beside her, she beseeched him, "Tell me it did not happen, oh, tell me it never could have happened! But I know it could not, for had he really been like you, he could have escaped, he need never have let them do that to him!"

"It did happen," Miguel answered. "De L'Ancre was the judge, and I have let you see it truly. And Dominic d'Irandatz could easily have escaped, but—he had to suffer. How could it be otherwise? How could he see his followers prove their faith without proving his? And it is the law that once in a given circle of years, the high-priest, the incarnated god himself, must be a sacrifice. If the persecutors had not made the pyre for him, he must have made it for himself in the sight of the congregation. He

must be sacrificed, burnt, his ashes scattered on the fields, or he could not be resurrected; he could not be reincarnated.”

Christine watched him, awe-struck by the exaltation in his determined face. She saw that he believed. She was in the presence of faith, and she felt a subtle, tingling need to share it, to worship him or to worship with him, to feel this certainty that shone in his face.

Why couldn't she? Why did an irresistible

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voice within her whisper that this might be all illusion?

“Do you want to see how Dominic d'Irandatz died?” he asked, turning a deep fiery gaze upon her, under which she quailed.

“No, no, I couldn't bear it!”

“You are right,” he said, rising. “One has to have faith to bear it. But he died nobly, and his followers with him—”

In silence he guided her back to the inner house.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT was the night of the first of May, a soft, warm, dark night with the merest silver peel of a new moon over the trees that enclosed the grassy open space in front of the high-swung arch of the great grotto. But the slight bright curve was not admired by the people who were whispering at the edge of the black lake—Lydia’s treasure-hunting expedition which had arrived this far.

In a low but hectically intense voice she was railing at the gypsies who could not be persuaded to enter the mountain, even with the flashlights. To every promise of reward they answered sullenly that they hadn’t realized it was this particular grotto they were going to have to enter. Large unshaven fellows with thick lips and matted hair, they shifted from one foot to another and listened dully to the impassioned harangues made by both Lydia and Necato, but enter they would not, and they demanded instant payment for the trouble of having come thus far. Richard was going to give them some money and get rid of them this way, when an owl hooted piercingly close by, and the six took to their heels with incredible rapidity. Very soon they heard the noise of a departing motor, the one in which they had come and left standing at some distance.

“We’ll do it ourselves, then!” Lydia declared,

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and she made even Max pick up some of the tools they had brought.

And so, armed with flashlights, they made their way into the gigantic, black, deserted grotto. The cold electric glare showed the still lake, the dripping stalactites and stalagmites, the whorls and galleries; but there was no sign that it had ever been inhabited. Richard wondered in a fever of impatience how they would look for a treasure in this stone emptiness, much less look for Christine. He stood aside while Lydia was half crouching on the ground, earnestly whispering to her little black dog. She was letting it smell something—the scarf he had seen sticking out of her pocket, Christine’s scarf! Oh, the clever demon of a woman, she was counting on the dog to find the entrance!

Lydia kissed the animal’s muzzle and let it go. It ran about in circles for a while, sniffing and snuffling, and then it started off running through one

of the passages opening out from the great hall. And they had to follow in the narrow, twisting, rock-encircled paths, to climb up slippery places, to squeeze through small openings. The dog was becoming more excited, and finally with two short, sharp barks it leaped up against a large, smooth, apparently impenetrable piece of rock wall.

“Here, here!” Lydia shouted, “come, come, bring the tools here!” She clenched her own pale bony hands and beat against the stone as if to split it.

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Necato came running, lifting a heavy pick-ax to the attack, but instead of wielding it, she fell back shrieking and fled swiftly down the passage, away, out!

The massive block had slid noiselessly aside, had closed again, and Miguel Duhalde stood smiling before them.

Lydia and Max did not wait a fraction of a second to follow Necato’s example; and Richard found himself alone with this tall, sardonic man whose manner of arrival was not quite clear to him, but who could be none other than the “Devil” he had heard so many rumors of, the one human being who could tell him of Christine. With no other thought in his head, he burst out: “Where is she?”

“Out there.” The stranger pointed toward the exit. “She is safe for you, but she cannot come to you yet; I must—” but Richard hurried in the direction of the exit now himself. He heard a loud noise, tramping feet, many voices. It took him little time to reach there, for the galleries shone with torches now, but before he could resist he was seized by a crowd of men and dragged out.

Eager hands tore at him, and he was getting ready to fight for his life, when the voice of the stranger from the inner cave resounded commandingly behind him, and his captors fell back.

The rough stone hall was now nearly filled with men muffled in hooded capes, holding smoky torches; they must have been in hiding in

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the side caves; it had all been a trap. Richard felt certain that Lydia’s first story had been true, and that this was some smuggler’s stronghold. Lydia, Max and Necato had disappeared, at least he saw them nowhere, but up on a sort of naturally raised platform, besides the tall man who seemed to be in

command, he saw a girl whose fair hair shone as Christine's had done. It was she.

His heart beat violently. Should he call out to her? But he could never rescue her alone. He must get help; he must escape.

He looked around. He was still being watched, but his guards were whispering. He saw the lurid light of the torches shine on the pale, writhing rocks, reflected in the black, still waters of the lake. He calculated the distance.

Meanwhile Christine, for it was she, was taut with fear for him, watching his every move. She saw him leap out of the circle of his guards, reach the lake in two bounds, and dive into it. He had begun to swim with long, swift strokes before his escape was noted, but he was still far from the outer brim of the water when the alarm was given. A mad shout of rage went up, and a hundred black figures started in pursuit, some swimming after him, others running around to the entrance. But into this angry, noisy confusion Miguel Duhalde's voice cut like clear thunder: "Let him go!"

Christine, watching with anguish, saw that

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this time Miguel's people did not seem disposed to obey him. Or was it that the excited pursuers had not heard? In the shouting throng which the black assembly had become, she could not tell what was happening, until she saw the young men returning, dragging with them the wet and struggling Richard. She saw a gigantic fellow lift him up, she saw a long knife gleam close to him, poised, as if waiting for a signal—and then she heard Miguel Duhalde speak to his people.

What he said she could not well understand. It was in chanting, rolling Basque, but she saw the will of one man fronting a frantically angry mob; she saw his face, his whole body, hard and tense and strong with a determination that almost radiated from him like visible light. And, although the first effect of his intervention was to turn the threatening looks and gestures in his own direction, still he slowly bent them under his will. He tamed them, but without a note of anger, simply by the unshakable strength that was in his voice, his dark, indomitable face, his towering body.

The mob subsided under his eye into a congregation of mutely muffled people. Richard was released, the ranks opened to let him out, and he

disappeared in the night.

Christine sobbed with relief; and yet, at that moment, she saw nothing, she saw nobody, except Miguel. How could even Richard, how could any mortal be compared to him? She felt

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she knew now, knew for certain, that divine energy did descend, could incarnate itself.

She closed her eyes and sank exhausted into a stone seat in a little niche, while Miguel quietly explained to his meek listeners that the first of May festival would still be held, that he had only needed their help because it had not been certain how many attackers would come to the caves, and that since the only guilty ones had been caught, they might all go outside the grotto and enjoy the tables full of food and wine which they would find a little further away among the trees. After which there would be music, dancing, all they were accustomed to, and he would join them, but later.

Christine sat alone while the hall emptied and the torches flickered smokily out. The sounds of music and singing came from the green, but she hardly heard them. She did not mind the eerie darkness, the little gulping noises of the lake. So many thoughts, so many emotions, overwhelmed her that she shut the door of her mind to all of them, except the feeling that whoever Miguel Duhalde might be, fisher or farmer, devil or demi-god, he had in him an irresistible power that transcended common humanity; he was one to whom the proudest could defer.

Richard, yes, she loved Richard; the thought of him was like warmth, shelter and companionship. They would come together, she felt certain of that, but she could no more help adoring

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Miguel than trees could help bending in the wind from the south.

She raised her head and listened; it was as if someone had called her, as if he had called her. She rose and walked alone for the first time in the twisting outer passages with as sure a step as if he himself were guiding her. The secret rock door slid aside before her and she entered the mild light of the inner house. Pausing irresolutely, she took a gallery at the end of which was a low, dark door, the door to his room, which she had never entered, but around whose supposed splendor her imagination had often played.

She knocked lightly. Miguel's voice responded. And instead of the thundering demi-god, she saw him seated with his head in his hands in a room that was carved out of bare rock, bleak as a prison cell. He looked up; every line in his face was weary, his eyes were somber, his lips curved bitterly.

"Good; you have learned to come when I send for you. It is an odd thing that I have no one to send for but you, and odder still that I should need you.—But I knew after all that you were going to be with me to the end."

"The end?" she questioned, her heart sinking.

"To-night," he said, leaning forward, "you saw, even if you didn't altogether understand, that I was met with open rebellion."

"I saw that they were angry because you let

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Richard go, and I saw too that you mastered them, you alone!"

There was such yielding admiration in her look that he made an involuntary movement towards her, but immediately he resumed his preoccupation.

"I could tame them again, and again, and again, but—perhaps they are right! Oh, it was not because I let your Richard go—they took that only as an occasion to tell me that I was too merciful, to him and to myself. You don't know, how could you know, I have never told you what they expect of me!—Perhaps they are right—I must be weak, to want to tell you, a stranger, about our mysteries!"

He was muttering to himself. Was his mind giving way, Christine thought with despair, under a strain of which she knew nothing? Gently she touched his hand. "You who can read in the soul, you know that I would never betray you, in any way!"

"I know," he said, and fixed her for an instant with eyes so dark, so deep under the straight black brows, so piercing, so compelling, that she felt like glass before him. Then he looked away, and, following his gaze, she saw it rest on the only thing in the cell besides the table and the bench—a half-charred stake hanging on the wall. She shuddered, as if a cold breath had touched her.

"It does not make me shudder," he said firmly. "I have contemplated it every night of my life.

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My foster-father, the man who chose me as a small child because he saw in me the signs of one who could incarnate the god, brought me here. He explained to me the mystery through which he was himself to die. But I swear, yes, I swear by the Sun, that he said to me I was to be the last, that I was to choose no successor, that he knew this to be the will of the god.”

Christine looked at him with frightened eyes.

“I am not mad,” he smiled faintly, “but how can I explain a mystery to you, girl of little faith? If you were a good Christian even, you could understand. But you know that the Christians say their god was made man and died to redeem them from their sins. And, in the mass, they still sacrifice him for their sins. We understand that; it is telling the story of our god in a different way. And our god has had many names in many places. But always he has had to die to bring good to mankind, either spring, or immortality or redemption from sin, or all three together. And, since his nature is the fire of the sun, he must consume himself by fire when the time comes. Among our people, for thousands and thousands of years, the high priest, the incarnated god, has had to sacrifice himself. But when he ascended the sacred pyre, he had a vision and in it he saw when his successor must die, and he told him.

“My foster-father was old when his time came. I myself helped him up, I myself covered him with the sacred goat-skin, I waited to see if the

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vision would illumine his face, but he died without a vision! So I told the elders of our people that no time had been given me, and no one cared much. They were all prosperous and the faith was not strong. But in these last years misfortune after misfortune has struck them, and they have now begun to murmur that it is time for the sacrifice. They have never dared to tell me so before to-night. I don’t care; I am their master, and they know it. —But I, myself, I am not *certain*, that they aren’t right! I have thrown open my soul to the infinite, open to the soul of the world, the God, for a sign, a sign to know what to do—but none comes!”

He hid his face. There was such vibrating anguish in his voice that Christine was flooded with pity, but at the same time her common sense rose, clear, and outraged.

“Miguel Duhalde,” she was hotly decisive, “I too feel in you something far more than ordinary human power. But there is such a thing as madness! I say that you are in danger of it, if you really believe you must do as your

credulous ancestors did! Think! Think of the century that you're living in, of the civilized country. Such things can't go on here. I warn you I'll appeal to the law if you keep on in this madness!"

He laughed and took her hands. Her heart warmed to see a glint of his old self. He drew her so close she could hear his heart.

"You *are* alive, you have a soul—a young, limpid, fighting, untroubled spirit has chosen

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your body—I wish we had time for love!" He dropped her hands and arose.

"You don't understand, you never could understand the forces that compel me. The law! Civilization! But you, yourself, wanted to leave those silly, frittering, machine-made people. My people are crude; yes, I know that, and superstitious too, in the real sense. But we do as we like among ourselves; we have little to do with this law you talk about. The people who cling to me and to the old faith have enemies and the curé of Arraldia is the most violent. He leads the fanatics. Twice in my time he has had women killed who were accused of being witches, and he would give his immortal soul to reach me. But we leave the law outside! If my people or if his people are lost in this war, we give out word that so and so fell into a mountain tarn and couldn't be found, or into a deep ravine, or that he went away to the Argentine. In our language and with our past, we live in a country beyond this law. The gendarmes know enough not to meddle with our beliefs. They too could disappear!

"Ah, if you knew how old this is, how long a line of self-sacrifice there is, you would understand! Why do you think that Dominic d'Irandatz let the fool De L'Ancre burn him? He could indeed have escaped but his time had come. All the better if he could give a public example by his death, and let the executioner save him the trouble of self-immolation.—If only I knew!"

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The somber fire burned in his eyes again, and the girl was silent. Whatever she could do or say would be as straw in the wind before the obstinate energy in him. And for the first time in her life, she felt that she could not really understand, that the wings of her confident intelligence could not soar high enough. So she waited, humbly.

He tossed back his handsome head, seemed to shake off his thoughts with the black hair from his forehead. "I called you for one thing.—I have been looking into the evil souls of those women and that boy, three demons! And I have learned who it was that told them about the treasure of the inner house, and encouraged them to try to approach it. There was a plot among my own! They meant to let the strangers try the weight of our ancient precautions, of the curses, as they think. The seal being thus broken and the way clear, they meant to follow.—They were among the loudest shouters in the rebellion to-night.

"How can I blame them? If they think my time has come and I do not obey, how can they believe in me? But the truth is that the younger ones are losing the faith. That thing you call civilization is invading them. I celebrate the festivals as well as I can, but I seldom go to look at the dance, and the old rites are long ago forgotten. Love is no longer natural and holy to them. The curé has won. They are persuaded they come here in secret to sin. To sin! And with this poison in their souls they do sin. I could bear

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to die away from that, but I will not let the treasure fall into their grasp. And so, if anything should happen to me, you must do as I shall explain to you later. But first you shall see justice done to your enemies. Come!"

Christine went with him through the carved and sumptuous corridors, admiring as if she saw them for the first time the exquisite fantasies of stone, the pure, pale, lenient light that bathed them. She pressed close to Miguel when they descended into a dark and tortuous underworld, still going down and down interminable steps cut in the rock. Where was he taking her? What did he mean by justice? But she was not afraid. Never in this whole incredible experience had she once felt afraid while she was with him. From the first time she had come into his presence, she had felt the completest, serenest sense of safety, of naturalness, of command of life. Once she had seen a peasant woman come to pray in a church, standing for a moment before a saint's statue. There had been in her face such luminous confidence, such trustful familiarity, that Christine had envied her. Miguel Duhalde was certainly not, in any sense of the word, the statue of a saint; but with him she had sensed the possibility of relinquishing her will, even her understanding, as that simple woman had done.

So, although she was nervous now with a feeling of his interior conflict, she was still certain that under his protection no harm could come. Yet it

seemed to her excited senses as if the

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darkness were fluttering with sighs and presences, and she involuntarily jumped when something flitted past her head.

“Where is your hand?” he asked suddenly, and with a great relief she gave it to him.

“Keep very close to me,” he warned and for some minutes they walked slowly and carefully. Even in this black darkness she could feel that there were no walls, and below them she could hear the faint lapping of water. Then they stopped.

“Good,” he said, “we have crossed the narrow ledge. Whoever falls there is lost! I am going to show you now what no one except the priest of the sun has seen and survived—the treasure, and the secret temple.”

“Why do you say ‘and survived’?” she faltered.

“Because the punishment for those who try to steal in here is to show them the treasure—after which they die.—As you will now see your enemies die.”

Her heart leaped and stood still. “Madame!”

“If it be the last act of justice done by me!” His hands were moving radiantly over the rock, it slid aside under his fingers; they were in a lighted, vaulted passage.

Two huge oxen, cut in black marble, stood guard before a heavy iron door, their heads with the great lyre-shaped horns lowered as if for attack. The white enamel of their angry eyes

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almost seemed to move, but Miguel opened the door and they passed through.

They were in an octagonal room, hung with coruscating draperies, woven in silver and gold. Helter-skelter on the floor, which itself was a suavely splendid work of mosaic art, lay vases, bowls, boxes, swords, crystal cups, inlaid and chased with everything man thinks precious, and in the finest workmanship of all ages and countries, ancient, medieval, Cretan, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Moorish, Eastern, in the most gleaming profusion.

Christine bent with eager exclamations to linger over them, but Miguel kicked them carelessly aside.

“Those are some of the offerings that have been brought to us throughout the ages,” he said. “Some of our people have always been mariners.”

He went ahead through the splendor and she had to follow. In the passage before the next door, he gave her a white tunic to slip over her clothes. It felt softer to her than the thickest silk. Over himself he flung a yellow robe with a pale warm sheen, and even in the midst of these marvels Christine could not help seeing how nobly his head rose over this sunny color, these long sculptured folds.

The next room was circular and in its black marble walls were rounds and rounds of little niches, in each of which shone a white statue.

“This is the hall of the other gods,” Miguel

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explained. “Here is Orpheus and Adonis, Zagreus and Apollo and Apis and all the gods throughout the ages that have been partial incarnations of the great God. Here too is the Christian God,” and he pointed to an ivory crucifix. But he did not stay among these incomparable shapes whose beauty Christine wanted to admire. He still went ahead, but at the threshold of a high and somber gate, he paused.

“Let nothing surprise you,” he warned her, and they entered.

It was a hall, or rather a temple, severely plain in shining white stone, at the end of which stood a statue on a high altar. It was a winged bronze bull, Assyrian in its simplicity. Between its large, lyre-shaped horns, it carried the sacred disk of the sun.

Christine recognized in a flash the statue she had seen in the dream, or the vision, of the sabbat.

Before the altar stood a low, wide vase of the purest lines, of the most translucent stone, and in it shone an incalculable wealth of sapphires, rubies, diamonds, pearls, emeralds, of every winking, blinking, summer-colored stone that ever man committed murder for. And in front of this sparkling opulence knelt three figures, three figures so stiff, so still, so rigidly fixed in their gaze on the jewels that she would have sworn they too were statues, had she not recognized with a shiver that it was Madame, Necato, Max. Their hands were joined behind their

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backs, as if they were tied, but no rope was visible. They seemed not to hear, not to see anything, except the flashing wealth before them, but their faces were livid and frozen.

From the disk held between the horns of the bull came a golden radiance that bathed every corner of the white temple with a warm, thrilling, lambent, almost liquid light. If it had not been for the sight of the three mute and congealed figures kneeling there, Christine could have sung, so curiously, so inexplicably and serenely joyous did that light make her feel. And yet at the same time her pulses were beating fast, as if she were on the verge of some terrible, some wholly unimaginable event.

Miguel stood beside her, arms folded, immobile, while she let her eyes encompass everything. In all this glory of white and sun-color, there was one startling spot of blackness, besides the black garments in which Madame, Necato and Max were shrouded; this was a small gleaming black altar exactly opposite the altar of the sun. Miguel pointed to it.

“You must stand there. And when I lift my arms above my head you must throw these coals in the opening on the center of it.”

She nodded, afraid to speak, and took from his hand a little golden censer with glowing charcoal. She waited, stiffly, while he strode forward to the high altar. He placed himself between the jewels and the statue, with his back to the kneeling figures, and he prayed long; prayed

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with a vibrant fervor that was like deep music in a language Christine did not understand.

Then he turned. “Look at me!” he commanded, and the blank faces of the three turned up towards him, as if pulled. His voice was horribly cold, terrifyingly clear.

“There is no sacrifice more acceptable to the God of Light than the casting out of the demons of darkness. Throughout the ages, well-intentioned worshipers have brought Him the little bits of brightness reminiscent of His nature which men call jewels, yet He would give all of these for one act of justice, for one demon cast back into hell. And so I will offer him the three of you; no, even the four, for by your trickery you stole not only the bodies of human beings but that of an innocent animal. You wanted the treasure; you have now gazed your fill of it. There has been no pity in you; no pity will be shown to you. There has been no justice in you; but justice will be shown to you. Out of this temple of light, the gate to

darkness opens; this gate will open for you, you will walk through it, and you will fall into the abyss that is as black, as poisonous, as coldly cruel, as deliberately torturing as you have been. It is coiling with the ghoulish spirits of those who have been like you and cast out like you; evil defeated by good, darkness defeated by light. Depart!”

He threw up his arms.

Christine, though shaken and dizzy, managed

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to throw the glowing coals on the little altar, and a cloud of incense arose, an odor so sweet and penetrating that it nearly overwhelmed her, but she instantly knew the reason.

Before her amazed eyes, part of the long, white, gleaming side-wall of the temple slid aside, disclosing a high, wide, doorless gate, opening on nothing but the thickest, most inconceivable blackness, out of which came a foul, moist breath, barely combated by the blue clouds of incense from the altar. This night of corruption was made yet blacker by contrast with the radiance of the divinely golden light which did not penetrate it, but stopped abruptly at the threshold to this outer darkness.

But the horror drew with irresistible magnetic power the stumbling footsteps of the three who had risen at Miguel’s word of command, and who were now slowly, slowly creeping toward the abyss. They were like mechanical things, husks of human beings, only their feet moved and the head of the small dog in Madame’s flat bosom.

They were so black, so slinking, that Christine felt they were only pieces of the darkness of the abyss who had strangely become detached and were now rejoining their home. She watched them, feeling herself powerless to move or to speak or even to think, until they were within three small hesitating steps of the sinister gate. Then with a sudden rush she was tossed on contending waves. Ah, at last she was going to see justice done! The torturers were going to be tortured,

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the killers killed, and the savage joy of seeing the enemy vanquished swept through her. And yet, the most intense and sickening fear gripped her, the fear that Miguel really meant to carry this through!

She couldn’t, no, she couldn’t endure it! No matter what they had done. Was it certain that they could have helped doing what they did?

Beside herself, she stretched out her arms toward the high altar before which Miguel stood, grim and strong and stately, and she cried out:

“Mercy! Mercy! How can you be sure! Mercy!”

Could she reach him, could she reach him, before they took that last fatal step? The wretches lingered as if they had heard her voice in their cold isolation. And Miguel too had heard, his deep full voice rang out:

“Wait!”

The three stopped, pausing like mechanisms on the brink of the abyss, and Miguel went down toward Christine.

His face was severer than she had ever seen it.

“By what right do you interrupt the course of justice?”

Her mind swirled. “Oh, oh—she told me once that she had been so poor and miserable that the only joy in her life was five minutes of reflected sunshine that used to come on the factory wall.”

“Even if that were true, it is not enough. And it is only weakness in you which brings it forward. Millions of people have suffered a poverty

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even harder than hers, and it did not make them fiends. Fiends are born. They are breaths of evil that sneak into a body if they can, and they must be crushed. If you show them mercy then darkness will win in the great battle. Aid the light!”

“But are you sure? How can you be *sure*?” she reiterated helplessly.

“You can’t, but I have faith!”

Quick as lightning she threw back, “Have you? Are you certain? Have you not just told me yourself that you do not *know* whether your people are right in demanding you as a sacrifice? If you do not know, if you cannot be entirely sure of yourself, then you cannot judge!”

“Giving in to evil by pardoning it!”

“No, no! Only the simple truth that we don’t *know*!”

She saw that he was struck, that she had pierced the weak spot in his armor, and it hurt her almost physically to think that he could be vulnerable. She had wanted nothing so much as to believe entirely in his perfect untroubled strength.

He bent his head, and as if in answer to his mood, the golden light flowed more dimly from the sacred disk.

He swung around. “We must go!” And he beckoned to the three black figures to follow.

They left the darkening temple, and Christine heard with a certain dread the dull steps tapping behind them. They took off their robes,

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no longer sun-color, in the outer rooms, and passed through the pantheon where the pale gods shone in their dark niches, through the hall with the thousand idle forgotten shining bowls, out through the great iron gate, guarded by the two black oxen. Whenever they stopped, the melancholy file behind them also stopped, somber, rigid, unseeing, unhearing. While Miguel was shutting the gate, she stole a look at them, but quickly averted her eyes. It was like seeing corpses held up by invisible wires.

She touched Miguel's hand. "What have you done to them? What will you do with them? How can they follow us across that place, the narrow ledge where one can hear the water underneath? Should they not be—waked?"

He smiled wearily. "If I wake them, as you say, they will surely fall, and into the very darkness and loathsomeness from which you saved them; but as they are they can follow us perfectly. Only as they are now. I have done nothing to them except conquer their evil wills—for a time at least, long enough to command them to leave this country, this continent even, as fast as their feet can carry them."

They walked as they had done before over the wall-less ledge in the impenetrable darkness where the water gurgled below and poisonous odors rose, while behind them came the slow tap-tapping.

Once they were back in the mild light and suave air of the inner house, Miguel said:

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"The treasure caves and the temple can only be approached over this narrow bridge of rock which rests on a single pillar. At my death this pillar must be shattered. And you must do it."

"How?" Christine whispered with a terrified glance back at the three motionless ones, as if they might have understood.

"You must go to my room, you must take the stake down that hangs on the wall, nothing more. Then leave the Inner House, take with you what you like—to remember me with—then let the entrance rock slide into place, and I doubt if anyone will ever find even this!"

“But you must not die!” she insisted vehemently, afraid now that what she had said about his not having the certainty to offer himself as a sacrifice would finally push him to this mad decision.

He did not answer. Instead he turned around, opened a door, pointed to the little cell it disclosed, and the three stiff mutes went obediently in there. He shut the door.

“It is high time now I went out to see my friends who are celebrating my festival! Catalin, Lisalda, Marichu, they are all out there, dancing. They have given out the old costumes we keep for our friends—to make it as much like the past as possible, but how little is possible!”

To Christine, even though she was still dazzled by the treasure house, the scene before the grotto was superbly vivid.

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The little silver peel of the moon was lost in the reddish-yellow flames of the torches fastened to the trees and rocks. The huge white arch of the grotto, the black flashing surface of the lake made a startling background to the many whirling dancers in red and white and tasseled gold. They were in the midst of a breathless *arin-arin* as Miguel and Christine moved quietly to one side, in amongst the trees.

Seeing that the Master had arrived, several supplicants came to him, begging in low tones for his aid in this cause or that; to some of them he gave gold, others he dismissed rather sternly, but to one girl who complained that she had been cruelly treated by one Jean Hiribarren, he gave a little waxen image, telling her to concentrate her desire for vengeance on Jean through it, and he would be racked by fierce pains.

Aghast, Christine demanded, “But how is that different from Madame’s attack on her husband?”

“Justice,” he said simply. “Her cause is just and she has a right to vengeance. I know this cruel, arrogant man.”

“But—this girl, if she learns the trick of the image, may she not use it unjustly some time?”

“The image is nothing. Faith and imagination is everything. I give it to her because she believes in it, and that helps her to concentrate her imagination, her will, on Doyenard, like an arrow flying into his body. And it can enter his body only because the evil in his soul draws and

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attracts the harm from outside. If his soul were innocent she could rain curses on him forever and none could touch him. So we have always given this weapon to the weak; if they use it unjustly it only recoils on their own heads. Look at Madame, with all her power, and she had the power of a demon out of hell, she could not kill Gorostegui. He still lives because he is not really an evil man. And it is not age that has ravaged her face; it is the evil which she tried to call down on him, and on you.—But let us watch the dance!”

Nothing could have been quicker, fierier, more supple and graceful than the black-haired, black-eyed girls and youths whose feet were skipping so rhythmically to the old flutes and tambourines, violins and guitars. Off to one side the older people were still eating and drinking, pouring red wine into big silver goblets.

When the music stopped, the dancers flung themselves on the greensward. Near Miguel and Christine a couple of buxom girls had coyly withdrawn, throwing long glances at the near-by youths but pretending great absorption in each other. Their opulent, healthy bodies, their fresh pink color, their wavy hair half falling down, their whole palpitating air of pleasant looseness, delighted Christine.

“You can’t say,” she whispered to Miguel, “that those aren’t natural. They at least aren’t spoiled!”

He put his finger on his lip. One of them, a

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perfect Basque beauty with her short, straight nose, black brows, dark eyes close under them, was speaking to her friend.

“Wouldn’t you think they would get tired of those old tunes! I don’t think I’ll come here again, not unless he’ll let us wear our own new clothes; what’s the use of coming here and being forced to put on these old rags!” She tore contemptuously at her white embroidered sleeve, which did, indeed, give way.

“Who is he, do you know?” the other girl demanded, idly plucking at the grass and smiling at a hovering swain.

“How should I know! I think he’s crazy. Furious if you mention the city. Raves about everything old-fashioned. They say he’s been in Argentina, that’s how he has so much money to spend on these parties. Of course my father gets wild if I say anything against him. Oh, there are lots of people who’re afraid of him! You know, all the ones who crowded into the cave

and made us hide under the trees while the strangers came there with the flashlights and went into the grotto and then they had a fight or something. —What're you afraid of, Jean?"

She beckoned to one of the young men, who came near, red in the face.

Miguel pulled Christine away, muttering, "I have lost; yes, the poison is everywhere."

Under another tree they saw two younger girls, one of them hardly more than a child. She sat still, with downcast eyes, shy and charming.

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Her dark curly hair hung down in two thick braids; she was almost a woman, and yet she had an untouched look, a flower purity, cream and rose. The other was coarser, older, and she was bandying loud repartees with two men who were sidling closer to them, smirking and alcoholic.

Miguel made a move towards them, and clenched his hands as if he wanted to hit them, but drew back into the shadows. "What is the use of throwing them out? Sin is what they have made of it, and sin they will wallow in!"

The music had begun again, poignant, provoking, and all threw themselves into the dance with new fervor. But Miguel stepped forward and held up his hand, shouting something. Instantly the music stopped, the dancers stopped, there was motionless silence.

He took Christine's hand. "Come," he smiled, "the time has come to finish. We will lead the final procession, and for that I must have a queen!"

The memory of what she had once seen, vague and yet vivid, drove the blood to her cheeks, and his firm clasp was like an electric shock up to her shoulder. He laughed, "You are committed to no more than this. The other was long ago, in the shadows!"

And then the little wild sweet lilting air she had heard before rose softly from the flutes, and each man took his partner by the hand and formed in a long procession behind Miguel and Christine. Half walking, half dancing, they began

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to make the tour of the large grassy space, almost dark now with the torches flickering lower and lower, until the glistening costumes were only vague whitenesses in the velvet, summer blackness. Still they stepped on to the vagrant rhythmic air, and they continued even after the last torch had

expired in a yellow flame. But in the complete night, they began to sing, a long, wailing, slow song, a chant as of misery for the dead light. In spite of Miguel's hand clasping hers, so strong, so warm, Christine felt a certain coldness trickling down her spine at the ferocious primitive sadness of it—thus must the men in the stone-age caves have sung over the dead light.

Then it stopped. For one moment there was silence and night. Miguel's hand left Christine's. He stooped, and a tongue of flame shot up before him. He had set fire to an enormous pile of brushwood accumulated at one end of the place. It was dry, and blazed up like a monstrous fiery flower in the night, spreading and rising to a fountain of heat and brightness.

Loud joyous cries broke out, a stirring staccato whirl of little drums, and the eager shrilling of fifes. Everyone took hand and danced around the fire in a large, undulating, swiftly running ring. Faster, faster, faster, maddening, intoxicating; and then when the thirsty flames were slackening, a young man broke from the ring, gave a long jump, leaped through the very fire, and landed a little scorched but unscathed at the

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other side. The ring broke, they all wanted to leap through, it became a fantastic, living frieze. They formed in line at one side and jumped through one after the other, boys and girls, the firelight on their faces, arms, flying hair, long, supple, naked legs, a medley of wild, warm colors, cries and laughter.

No one jumped so often and so well as Bichincho, the little cabin-boy, now sound again, whom Miguel had brought from the fishing town. He would wait not until the fire died down but until it flared up with the intensity of a new armful of wood. Then he soared through it, curly hair, red-brown, laughing face, curving, boyish lips that he hastened to press on those of the young girl with the flower freshness and the long braids.

Miguel laughed and nodded at the two. "That is good!" But soon a shadow crossed his face. "Even so, we must finish!" He motioned to the musicians, who blew a long, strident fanfare. No more wood was brought to the fire, and as it faded down into red, scintillating, dying stars the assembly disappeared with uncanny swiftness. The indistinct forms melted into the darkness of the trees and the invading night; and, noiselessly in their rope sandals, they took the paths through the hills to their homes.

Soon Miguel stood alone by the dying fire. Three white figures moved about by the tables in the background; they were Catalin, Lisalda, Marichu,

the servants of the inner house, busying

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themselves with uncovering the tables, putting away the costly silver vessels.

Christine watched the red stars becoming black embers, part of the night. The little cabin-boy was crouching near her; he, too, had stayed. His eyes had been fixed on the tall tragic silhouette of Miguel, standing there, his arms folded, watching with frowning intensity the last flickers of the fire he had lit.

It died.

Christine heard him call her and the boy. They followed him into the grotto, through the passages that led to the inner house, and through the secret entrance.

Once there, Miguel went straight to the place where he had shut in Madame, Necato and Max. He opened and they came out, still corpse-like, mechanically moving and stopping. He looked into their dead flat eyes, and to each of them he said: "You will follow this boy to the frontier of Spain, you will cross the frontier alone, you will go on your feet, begging your way, the whole length of Spain, beg your way across to Africa, find a cave in the Atlas mountains, and stay there until death relieves the desert of you."

He turned, put his hands on the shoulders of the boy, who shivered with delight, and spoke to him affectionately in Basque. Bichincho nodded violently and started off along the carved corridor, the three following him. Miguel had preceded them, Christine coming slowly after. At the other end of the inner house, Miguel slid

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aside the rock that gave on the valley garden. It was black night, but the boy went out confidently, his ghastly crew tumbling after. The soft light from the interior shone a moment on the garden, was reflected in the little brook, then Miguel shut it away. He and Christine were alone in the valley garden.

She sat down, a little breathless, her heart beating, on the low rock where she had sat so often in the days of her convalescence, in the days when Miguel had first appeared to her, handsome, laughing, confident. And

still, even then, at the very beginning, he had said he was wearing black for himself—that he was the last Devil.

She felt sleepy. The heavy odors of the trees and flowers, the little clear, unceasing notes of the brook, the thick, soft darkness, all enveloped her senses and forced her toward sleep. She could hardly sit upright; she would lie down on the stone. But as she let herself go, she felt an arm about her. Miguel had quietly come to her side. Yet his touch was impersonal and his voice was cool, almost casual, as he said:

“I don’t know in what way it will come, but I know that to-night, before dawn, the end will come for me, so you must promise me once more that at my command you will go to where the stake hangs in my room and take it down. You know how to slide the rock aside, and how to close it.”

Thinking to take his mind off this obsession of his approaching end, she said, “I have never

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asked you, but I have often wanted to, why it is that by doing so simple a thing I could make the pillar explode in the deep caves of the mountain. And the lovely light that shines in the inner house, where does it come from?”

“If everything were clear to me,” he answered slowly, “I could perhaps make it clear to you. I know this, that the power to explode the pillar and the power that makes the light shine come from me. No, I am not insane. When I die there will be darkness in the mountain. You see—well, you have seen a storehouse for electricity, where light and power are made and stored. In some way, by a power coming through me, I can will the light that shines in the rock house, and I can will the taking down of that stake to cause the explosion, as if my mind were the storehouse. The power could go out from it without wires.”

“But is it electricity then?” Christine ventured.

He paused, then answered rather curtly, “Yes, it is—but you use that word without understanding it. Electricity is the word men give to that little part of the divine power which they have been able to understand mechanically. But it is everything, and everything is it. It is the energy of the God we have worshiped here for so many thousands of years, in so many different incarnations. Out of this energy all is made, and can be unmade—as I have leashed a shock to the taking down of that stake which can destroy the pillar of rock.”

“And the three evil beings you sent into the desert just now, were they too made out of it?”

“I understand that no more than you do, but I believe as I have been taught, that the eternal energy is divided into light and darkness, good and evil; and that we, or part of us, have been created by the light to help it in its battle against the darkness. You should not have stopped me from sending them to the abyss where they belonged.”

“Oh, if I could be certain that everything were so simple! I did believe once in hate and love—and yet—”

“And yet?” His arm tightened about her.

“And yet—in this very place where I wanted you in every drop of blood—I couldn’t.”

His hold relaxed, and she mourned that warm and pliant strength; but she continued: “Here I have lost the only certainty I had, the certainty that I knew myself. I hate Madame and her horrible son and that fiend Necato; and yet, when it came to the point, I could not see them destroyed. Why? I don’t know!—I love you—I love you as humbly as Bichincho does, as humbly as if you were a god, and I don’t believe it makes any real difference if I keep myself for Richard—but I can not do it! It is much stronger than I am. But if I had met you first—”

She waited, trembling. A little wind ran murmuring through the pines and cypresses; it was like voices whispering in the night still dark around them. Miguel was silent a long while, his

head thrown back, as if he were listening to the voices. Finally he said: “It is well for you, you did not meet me first. I never could and I never would have satisfied you. There are thousands of years between us! When I first saw you I wanted to keep you here because you were like one of the shadows I had seen in the past, and afterwards it pleased me that you were not afraid of me, and that I could talk with you. You were different from the simple girls here. But I see now that the price of that kind of love would be that you would want me for yourself alone, as you keep yourself for him alone; and this is against my nature. Love to me is sunlight, to be enjoyed wherever it may be. I am—the last Devil, now that love has been changed

to sin. Oh, I know that with you it is another thing, something I did not know. Perhaps you will win against the curé. I have lost. My time is over.”

Thinking that his fixed idea, his obsession, was capturing him again, Christine exclaimed: “Leave all this! Go into the world. A man whom everyone wants to obey can be anything he likes. I too must get back to the world. I have Richard to find. And we will both be your friends.”

He laughed dryly, “How can I be more than I am—a priest of the Sun? But there is this much of orthodoxy in you that you must treat every other religion as an obsession or superstition. Because you have no faith you deny it to me.

“Forgive me, it is I who am the poorer,” she

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said simply, and thrilled for an instant to his lips that lightly touched her cheek.

There was silence between them, but charged and tense. They sat motionless, as if they were waiting. Perhaps it was for the dawn—but it was long in coming.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RICHARD HOLMODY, not a little surprised that the hue and cry after his escape from the grotto should have ceased so abruptly, halted in the dim light of the spring stars to take counsel with himself. Although the night was warm, he shivered, partly with the unexpected swim in the cold lake, but more with the horror he felt at having had to leave Christine in that wild mob, barely restrained by the ambiguous but decidedly masterful personage in command.

But he dared not stop to think—his only chance to save her was to find the nearest gendarmerie, rout them out, tell them a young girl had been kidnaped, and lead them back to the grotto. But where was there a house even, to ask his way from? Far down the valley he saw a small yellow pane of light. Stumbling and running, he reached it at last; it was the usual huge Basque farm, low and wide, a formidable bulk with its one eye of light. He knocked.

After a while he heard dragging steps, and an old woman opened the door, peeping cautiously at the stranger. In shaky French she asked him what he wanted, and he told her without any beating about the bush that he wanted the nearest gendarmerie. She cried out, calling on all the saints, and came out with a lantern to inspect him. Reassured, apparently, she invited him into the huge, whitewashed kitchen, shining with copper pots, garlanded with onions and red peppers,

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and began to question him. He did not like her white, long-nosed, wrinkled face, full of craft, but it was not long before he had more or less told her of his whole experience. She gathered at least that he wanted to rescue a young girl from the hands of a band of people commanded by somebody whom he had heard referred to as the Devil, and this information seemed to stir her to her very depths. Yet she controlled herself, and with a calm show of reason, began to explain to him that the gendarmes would not be of the least use to him, even if he could reach their barracks, which were many, many kilometers away. She assured him that he would only be laughed at for his pains; and indeed he more than half suspected she was right.

After all, as far as Christine was concerned, what proof could he offer that she was not there of her own free will? And as far as mentioning devil-worship and killing by suggestion went, he could see the cold northern smile of the brigadier to whom he would propose this category of crime! Nor had he any evidence that the people he had seen were smugglers. He rested his head in his hands, at his wit's end.

The old woman touched his shoulder and told him not to despair. At that very moment, she said, all the right-thinking men of Arraldia and environs were gathered in the village church. They were a confraternity, her own boys were with them, and the curé would only need to be told where this Devil was to be found to descend

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on him and free this girl, and execute justice among the loathsome witches and evil-doers there. Oh, she herself had suffered from them. Oh, there was a girl, one Catalin, a proper witch who had once worked for Monsieur de Gorostegui, who had thrown evil spells over her and hers. And another, a loose-lived wench, who had seduced the old woman's eldest son, Jean Doyenard—this very night a pain and palsy had stricken him, and they would be praying over him in the church. Oh, she and her family, and other families in the village, had a long score to settle with that lot, and the sooner Monsieur got to the church the better. They could sweep down on the nest that very night.

She led him out, she pointed out the way and sped him on.

The grim square mass of the church of Arraldia was lighted; he could see the yellow slits in the thick walls. He hesitated outside the door. From the interior came many mumbling, praying voices. But, there was nothing else to do. No other help. Fight fire with fire, and superstition with superstition, he said to himself, and pushed the door open.

He walked straight up the aisle, paying no attention to the sudden silence and the turning heads, up toward the strong figure before the altar, who, seeing this intruder, came rapidly to him, his cassock swishing, his hawklike face sparkling with anger.

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Richard held up his hand to ward off the words about to slash at him. "Monsieur le curé, I must speak to you at once on a matter of life and

death!”

The curé halted, scrutinizing the serious, excited face before him. “Come,” he said abruptly, and led the way to a bare little vestry, where they were alone except for a stark wooden crucifix, twisted and agonized with all the cruelty of Spanish realism.

“Well, monsieur?” the curé looked piercingly at Richard from under his gray, pent-house eyebrows. He did not in the least look like the kind of man to whom one could tell old women’s tales of devils and witches and evil spells. Richard searched desperately for a plausible account of why he had come, but he could think of no better introduction than to say as he had been instructed, that la mère Doyenard had sent him and that she begged Monsieur le curé to come at once with his most trusted men and there would be the chance they had all waited for so long to clean up the nest of devil-worshippers in the mountains.

Richard gulped a little on the word “devil,” but to his joy the curé listened to it as if it were any other ordinary word, and then he began to put short, sharp questions. Who was Monsieur? Where did he come from? How did he know about this matter? How did he know la mère Doyenard?

There was nothing for it except to explain

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that he had gone with Madame de Gorostegui and some others to search for a fabled treasure in the mountains, which Madame had told him was guarded by a man known as the “Devil,” and that they had fallen into a trap from which he alone had escaped. But his only object now was to get help to rescue a young woman, his fiancée, who had also been imprisoned by these mountaineers, whom he had seen there.

At the word “Gorostegui” the curé betrayed great agitation. “Is Pacheco dead?” he cried. “And how do I know that you and his wife between you haven’t murdered him by evil tricks? Give me news of him, news that I can verify, and I’ll go with you!”

Time was precious. “Pacheco Gorostegui is at the castle,” Richard answered. “I can lead you to the very room where he lies; but whether he is dead or not, I do not know. I only discovered him myself this very evening, and if I had a share in the guilt of the state he is in I should hardly offer to lead you to him. But come to the grotto first!”

“To the grotto we’ll go,” the curé exclaimed, “but we’ll go by way of the castle, save Pacheco, and then to the mountains. Just after their hellish orgy

will be over, the ring-leaders will be staying behind and we can catch them. As we do not know you, you must consent to come with us under guard. Meanwhile stay here!”

He strode out, but not so fast that he did not

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have time to turn the large key in the lock outside.

Richard, nervously pacing about, could hear the strong voice calling out name after name. Evidently he was choosing his soldiers. There was a good deal of running back and forth, of muffled, excited language. He bit his lips, wondering what sort of wasps’ nest he had stirred up. Fight fire with fire, yes, he had to; but he had caught the fanatic note in the people on both sides of this medieval struggle. Well, they could do to each other what they liked, and to Lydia and her brood too, if he could only succeed in snatching Christine away.

At last the key creaked in the lock and the curé motioned to him to come. They went out of the church, to the open place, where he could hear, though barely see, a large lorry. It was full of men, utterly silent, among whom he took a seat. The curé got in last, and with him a white-clad altar boy.

They thundered off, heavily swaying over the rough road. Before long they were entering the park of the castle, and now they came to a halt in the courtyard.

Frightened servants peeped from the windows and hid, while Richard found lights and guided the curé, the altar-boy and a couple of the men up into the old part of the castle, where he had last seen Gorostegui.

And indeed he was still there, stretched yellow

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and emaciated on a pallet in the padded tower room. Was he dead? The curé evidently did not think so, for he began at once to chant a sonorous exorcism, ordering the boy to light the blessed candles they had brought at the head and feet of the apparent corpse.

With bell and book and candle, every demon that might have been sent to lodge in the body of Pacheco Gorostegui was adjured to leave it, and when at last the curé drew himself up to his full height and shouted, “*Vade, retrograde Sathanas!*” Richard was petrified to see that the sunken yellow

eyelids opened, disclosing dark eyes that stared at them with returning consciousness.

Out of the twisted mouth came a thin, broken voice, giving thanks to God for the miracle of speech restored; and weakly, childishly, Pacheco told how his sufferings had come about. He began to suspect that his wife and her servant Necato were witches, and had he not been so ashamed of this marriage he would have appealed for help to his former neighbors and curé, but soon it was too late. By black arts they drained his strength so that he, who had been the fleetest pelota player, the strongest wrestler, could hardly raise his hand. He had been bedridden, he had lost not only the power to move his limbs but the power to speak, save for the one prayer that had saved his life, had foiled the witches, in spite of their rage and imprecations, in spite of his sinful insignificance. Yes, his face shone, he had

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seen, standing about his pallet, forming a guard around him, the blessed Virgins of Lourdes, of Guadeloupe, of Pilar.

“Laudate Dominum!” the curé broke out, and then eagerly, “Where are they now, the accursed witches? Speak! Are they with him they call their Master, the Devil?”

Pacheco nodded, but the excitement had been too great for him; he fell back into the coma, showing only by the faintest of breaths that he was still alive.

As if he had noticed Richard in the room for the first time, the curé turned to him. “I must trust you then, Monsieur, to show us the way. There is no time to lose; it is after one o’clock—”

“Two o’clock!” Richard exclaimed angrily, then suddenly remembered that here in the Basque mountains no attention was paid to interfering summer time, so he repeated meekly, “One o’clock!”

The curé ordered him to help carry the sick man out, and when they arrived in the courtyard they placed him carefully in the lorry. The heaving machine was about to start, when Richard was terrified to see Mrs. Watts come running out, up to them, calling, “Richard, Richard, where are you going?”

“Another witch?” said the curé grimly, and before Richard could well imagine what they were about, two men had whipped off and were hoisting

Mrs. Watts into the lorry. Richard caught her, drew her down by him; and, on the

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inspiration of the moment, whispered to her that by special luck they were all to take part in a native Basque mystery play, a peripatetic thing which no other foreigners had ever been permitted to witness, and she was not to be astonished at anything she might see or hear, as it would all be part of a solemn mummary. Her thirst for the quaint instantly aroused, she settled herself as best she might, silent and expectant.

The lorry started off, engine rumbling, big headlight searching out the road. In the midst of all his anxieties, Richard could not help smiling at the marvelous anachronism they were enacting—a band of furiously determined witch-hunters setting off in an automobile. But, after all, in Spain he had often seen a new motor drive up to a church to be blessed and placed under St. Christopher's protection. He shrugged his shoulders.—Why were they stopping?

The car was panting at a farm house, the very one where he himself had stopped; one of the men hopped off, went in and brought back the old woman, la mère Doyenard, pushing her up into the lorry next to the curé, with whom she at once began whispering.

Off they went again, hurtling into the ox-cart tracks that took the place of the road, waggling dangerously from side to side as the ascent began. Just as Richard was fearing that the people in the grotto would hear the rumbling and be well warned to hide, the lorry halted.

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Everyone got off, four men picked up the improvised stretcher on which Gorostegui lay, and the ascent continued over the gorse and rocks. Four tall youths surrounded Richard and Mrs. Watts as if afraid that he might try to escape, and he was asked again to describe exactly where he had been. They seemed to decide then to divide into two groups, one party to make a detour and approach the grotto from behind, in case, as they suspected, there should be more than one exit from the caves. The other party, which kept the strangers with them, were going to descend to the open space before the grotto.

The descent began, the Basques moving surely and noiselessly in their *espadrilles*, Richard lagging behind with his aunt, both of them stumbling

in the darkness. Mrs. Watts was now fully awake. She had decided it was indeed a grand adventure and rare opportunity.

Richard could hardly see the path before him by the uncertain starlight. No more torches burned before the grotto, no signs of any life—he felt cruelly disappointed. They had come too late. But the young men near him suddenly made him stop. In spite of the dark the advance guard had seen something with their keen country eyes. Indeed it seemed to Richard that he too could now catch a glimpse of two or three faintly white spots moving among the trees.

But he could neither hear nor see the men who were proceeding down with cat-like caution, now avoiding a loose stone, now crouching behind

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the gorse. The white figures below were more alert; suddenly a warning cry went up from one of them, and they darted toward the grotto.

It was too late. Although Catalin, Marichu and Lisalda fought with reckless fierceness, twisted, scratched and bit, surprised as they had been in their work of clearing away after the feast, they could not resist many minutes before they were tied up like animals and flung on the ground.

Then, exulting in their victory, the captors sent up the long wild ululating cry, the *Irrintzina*, the Basque cry of triumph that sounded at Roncevaux and long before that in the cave-like dark of the beginnings of human history.

And Richard Holmody trembled to hear it. He knew that not one of the three girls captured was Christine; but, having seen the treatment meted out to them, he began to hope she might not be found. Had he, with the best intentions in the world, unleashed forces he could not control, forces that might engulf all of them—Christine, himself, his poor innocent aunt who clung so trustfully to him, never complaining, had he done wrong to try to fight fire with fire?

As if in confirmation of his fears, the penetrating shivery hooting of the *Irrintzina* came from across the grotto-mountain. The men in the other party, the one of which the curé had taken command, were answering their comrades in equal triumph—they too had taken captives.

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Who might it be, Richard wondered tensely. His brain, lame with weariness, began a flickering attempt to sketch out an escape with the two,

his aunt and Christine—if he found Christine!

Another long-drawn, ominous cry came from across the mountain, louder, wilder, more cruelly victorious than either of the preceding. It rose, and fell and rose again, rolling in the echoes, trailing away at last like the low howl of far wolves.

Then silence and the darkness. The three girls lay motionless on the ground; they had ceased to cry out and struggle. Their captors stood around; good soldiers, having done their duty and waiting for their commander to learn the next step.

Mrs. Watts was in a heap on the ground, Richard by her side, both of them well watched. But he had forgotten any idea of escape. All that was left of energy in him was concentrated in a breathless, grueling suspense.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHRISTINE, still sitting by Miguel in the valley garden, found herself wishing that dawn would never come. The tenseness she had felt at first, the sense of being electrically surcharged, was gone, and she experienced a great contented relaxation. Never had she thought so sweet and warm a tranquillity could flow in her veins. She could not see his odd, archaic, imperious profile, his long, narrow, darkly haunted eyes; but she shut her own eyes and imagined them; and from his arm pressed around her body this divine and passionate peacefulness came.

At last he knows what he wants to do, she thought. Then she ceased to think, at least her thoughts no longer came in the little, definite, ticketed packets of words, instead they rolled through her whole body like warm overwhelming waves—waves not limited to her, rather were they long undulations that included her, uniting her mysteriously with the many fragrances in the valley garden, with the soft and paling darkness, with the stars above and the winds whispering in the trees below. For once, for one brief but eternal moment, she felt utter peace, inexpressible yet all-comprehending happiness. And she knew that it came through the touch of Miguel. She wanted it to go on forever.

And then the harsh cry of the first *Irrintzina* broke upon them.

It was like discord crashing through a perfect

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symphony. The crystal circle was shattered. Miguel leaped up, straight, alert, listening. With anguish the soul of Christine came back to its prison of words and anxieties.

“What is it?” she begged him, but he did not answer, only stood statue-like, straining forward.

And then, much nearer, almost on top of them, came the second cry, sharply piercing their ears. He turned quickly, took her by the shoulders. “They have got the wretches I sent away with Bichincho—I forgot them! The moment has come. To the inner house with you, hurry to my room, take down the stake that will explode the pillar of the bridge to the treasure house, and then run out as fast as you can, before I die and the darkness fills the mountain. Now!”

She ran. With that tone in his voice there was no second thought possible. The rock door had been left open a crack. She darted through, slid it in place after her and then made breathlessly for his room, for the small bare place where the half-charred stake was hanging on the white wall, the awful, ever-present symbol of his predecessors' fate. Could she find it quickly, quickly, before the terrible darkness would come, the darkness that would mean the end of Miguel?

Yes! There was the low black door at end of that gallery. She burst in. But even as she lifted her hand to tear down the piece of charred wood, she had a moment of lucid incredulity, saw clearly the absurdity of actually believing this—but she tore down the stake.

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It resisted a little, as if it were more closely fastened than she had thought, and then it came thudding to the floor. And, from far far below, came another sound, a dull shaking thunder, over in an instant—but it made her hair rise slowly, chillingly—Miguel had been right!

Then panic fear shook her. Out, out, before the rest of his prediction should come true, and the light in the inner house be quenched forever, leaving her alone in the frightful darkness of the mountain, the earthen darkness that would be filled with the ghosts of the past and the demons rising from the abyss below. Already, she thought, the soft radiance was waning.

Half-crazed she began to run through the galleries; she knew the way so well to the door that led to the grotto, she could find it without stopping to verify the direction, only out, out!

But the galleries and corridors curved bewilderingly, led up and down, and all the carved signs and symbols, the winged bulls, the faces of the sun and moon, seemed to be twisting and grimacing, taking on an uneasy terrible life of their own, as if they too dreaded the coming night.—Christine stopped, realizing she had lost her way. She was in a ruined gallery, one she had never seen before, far from the door to the grotto.

Her terror was complete, her bones like frozen jelly. She did not give a thought to the starvation, the slow, hungry death she might have to suffer in this stone labyrinth; no, it was the primitive,

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soul-shaking fear of the monstrous darkness. Mechanically she pushed open a door near her hand, it opened on a little room where the sacred circle shone above a small altar, the disk of the sun, still reassuringly, luminously mild and golden. She threw herself on her knees to it, caught by a sudden impulse, and prayed intensely, naïvely:

“Light, light, do not go out! Do not go out! Help me!”

Then she felt, or thought she felt, a cool strong hand laid for one electric instant on hers. And with this touch vibrating through her, she rose, now completely calm, perfectly assured that she would find the way.

And she did. Unerringly she passed through the labyrinth as if the invisible hand were still guiding her. So far was she from fearing to be entombed in the night, that she stopped to pick up a little knife in a steel and gold sheath lying in the corridor, one which she had seen Miguel carry. Let that be her keepsake—she slipped it into her bosom. The metal was icy for an instant against her warm breast, then she forgot it.

Without any misadventure, and before the golden light had faded in the least nuance, she came to the vaulted entrance before the door to the grotto, and without a tremor she pressed the spring that slid it aside. Looking back once, drinking in with wide-open eyes the shining beauty of the inner house of the priests of the Sun, she let the rock close.

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She was in the passage that led to the grotto, and she was guided in her exit by the red light of torches that shone at the other end. Hardly had she gone half the way to the great hall, before a man jumped out from behind a stone and took her by the throat. Strangely enough this attack came almost as a relief, she had been so tautly expecting a peril at every step. So she let herself go, inertly, as if she had fainted, and the man had to pick her up and carry her, which he did, roughly, but expeditiously. They were soon in the great hall, where he dumped her like a sack among several other women whom she did not at first recognize, being a little blinded by the flaring torches which now again illuminated the vast rough grotto.

Then, quietly, she began to reconnoiter. With a shock of horror, she saw that the women she sat between, almost touching, were Madame and Necato, still stiff, rigid, corpse-like, yet rigidly alive. Shuddering she withdrew her dress from them, and turned her head to look back. Behind her were Catalin, Marichu, Lisalda, each tied hands and feet, their clothes half torn off, Catalin’s rosy white body, and the deep creaminess of the

others gleaming through. But they sat simple and serene, a look of exaltation in their eyes, and they answered Christine's anguished glance with a faint, sisterly, reassuring smile. Their little group was surrounded by stolid, stone-faced men, the curé's trusted soldiers, and across from them Christine saw another group, equally well

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guarded. Among them she recognized with quickly beating heart—Richard!

Her soul went out to him, he looked so pale, so disheveled, so utterly weary; and yet he lifted his tied hands in a quick little greeting to her. Her head swam, she began to think she was seeing hallucinations—why was he here, and why was Gorostegui there with them, lying yellow and still on a stretcher. Still more strange, why was Mrs. Watts there, gaping and excited, most extraordinarily dressed in a blue quilted silk kimono and pink silk pyjamas?

Max too was there, his wizened white face in the same coma as his mother's, and with two stalwart youths guarding him. Not far away was little Bichincho whose brown curls rioted with their usual insouciance around his handsome boyish face with the oddly determined lips. He did not appear in the least disturbed, his eyes were fixed steadfastly on a dark recess near the back of the grotto. Christine felt that Miguel must be there, but four tall peasants stood before it.

Besides the groups of guarded prisoners, there was one other, apparently the self-constituted judges. On the naturally raised stone platform a rough plank table had been put, and at it sat Monsieur le curé of Arraldia; Christine recognized him well—his proud gray head and grimly energetic profile dominated the wooden faces of his followers, several of whom were seated at the table with him, all men except one old woman, la mère Doyenard. They were having a

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whispered consultation, the curé pointing now to this now to that group.

A creeping discomfort struck Christine when his long bony finger finally remained pointed in her direction, and la mère Doyenard rose and sidled towards them. But with an ominous sugary smile, she indicated Catalin to the men, who at once untied her and made her stand up. She swayed a little.

“Ah, my pretty one,” the old woman snickered, “you think you’re going to dance again, you think you’re going to ruin us all by your devilish tricks,

but it is finished now, finished!”

Catalin paid no attention to her but walked steadily up before the curé who immediately began to question her.

“Is it true that you, Catalin Argoyti, have renounced your baptism, made a pact with the Devil, in return for which he gave you power to send curses on the family of Doyenard and their cattle?”

Catalin said nothing.

“Answer me!” he shouted.

She still said nothing.

One of the men came up with a piece of knotted rope and a little stick in his hand. He pointed to her head and indicated that if the rope were twisted around it, perhaps she would speak.

But the curé shook his head impatiently. “Well enough if we had time, but we have to make sure of their guilt in the quickest way and then finish with them. Prick her for the mark!”

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He got up from the table and the others with him. Two men seized Catalin and threw her on the table, holding her there though she made no resistance. La mère Doyenard approached, and out of her deep pocket she carefully fished a monstrously long thin awl or needle. Pulling the torn clothes still further off the lovely marmoreal body, she poised this thing over it.

Christine, her mouth dry, remembered that Miguel had told her how the priest of the Sun marked the worshipers by touching them, and that the divine energy left the spot anesthetic. She tried not to look, not to listen, and yet she saw the spasm of Catalin’s body, and heard her keen cry as the old woman plunged the dagger-like needle into her left side. It could not be true about the anesthesia, for cry after cry came from Catalin. Christine writhed, and yet she was stricken with deeper horror when she saw the needle go into the round white shoulder—and heard no cry.

Yes, one of triumph from the witch-hunters: “The mark!”

Catalin was hustled off and carried out. Where? Christine’s thoughts followed her in fear, and then she saw the brown Lisalda go up before her judges. She stood smiling, sustained by the knowledge that her family had always been faithful to the God.

To the question barked at her if she had not made a pact with the Devil, she answered simply,

“Yes, I am his, body and soul, and I pray you to make me suffer for his sake.”

All crossed themselves at such effrontery, especially when she herself bared her body and offered it to the needle of la mère Doyenard, who lost no time in plunging it in, again, as with Catalin, at the left shoulder. Lisalda looked as if a flower had touched her. And again the cry arose, “The mark, the mark!”

She too was led away, but she went as lightly, as gayly, as if she were going to a dance, to the dance.

The men who guarded the young women were all elderly; it was as if the curé did not entirely trust the young men so far. And, indeed, there had been a certain murmuring uneasiness among them, a certain suffering in their faces as the pointed awl of la mère Doyenard went plunging into the naked loveliness of Catalin and Lisalda. And when this experience was to be endured a third time, when Marichu, mild-faced, round, golden-hued and stubbornly silent was put on the torture-table, it was more than one of the youths could bear, a slim pale young man. Taking courage from the fact that he was the curé’s nephew, he stepped forward, exclaiming:

“Is this a trial? If I had known that we were coming here to see young girls stabbed by an old woman—I—”

He had not finished before three of the nine sons of la mère Doyenard were on him like wild cats, and it required all of the curé’s authority

to disentangle his nephew from their angry clasp. Then he ordered the boy up before him, meanwhile throwing a cloth over the girl. He looked sternly yet sadly at the trembling young defiance.

“We have great work to do to-night, and you are hindering it. My own brother’s son! Ignorant boy! If you see a beautiful glistening serpent in your path, in the very path perhaps where you know that children will soon come, do you spare it because of its beauty? Those women, those mistresses of Satan, and their like, are a nest of serpents that have been poisoning this valley for untold years. No sooner does Holy Church think she has stamped out the brood than up it springs again. False pity is to blame, false mercy on their beauty or their youth. Let rather the pity be for their victims!”

An approving murmur ran around the hall. The young man hung his head, mumbling incoherently. The curé suddenly shook his fist in his face. "Take care, I say, take care! They have bewitched you! Down on your knees and pray!"

The youth sank down, bewildered and afraid, and the curé rapidly sprinkled him with holy water. "Up now," he ordered, "stand up and praise our justice. Not one of them shall be condemned without confessing she is Satan's or, if he has given them the gift of taciturnity, without finding the mark on them. You saw the mark found on the two first? What more proof do you want?"

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With a violent gesture the curé flung off the cloth, uncovering the golden curves of Marichu, and looked at her with the same perfect loathing he had shown for the other two beautiful bodies—the bitter eyes of the monk regarding the occasion of sin. He nodded to the old woman who had been quivering like a pointer to begin her probe. The young man got even paler and turned his head away. Instantly he got a resounding box on the ear. "Took!" his uncle roared. "Look! or I shall be forced to examine you!"

The thin shining awl of la mère Doyenard was poised in the air, but her expectations were ruined. Marichu spoke:

"I prefer to confess. I belong to him whom you call Satan. My soul and body. And because he has honored my body I will not have it mutilated. Let it go whole to the fire."

There was a terrified silence.

"To the fire it shall go," said the curé somberly, and Marichu was taken out.

Bichincho came next, the little ship's boy. He shook off the hand of the guard on his shoulder and walked up slightly rolling in his gait, like the sailor he was. Then he put his hands in his pockets and gazed at the curé with a mien in which the clear defiance of his eyes and the calm firmness of his lips contrasted oddly with his wild curly hair and fresh, rounded, downy boyishness.

The curé gazed back at him and waved aside his hench-woman who was already approaching

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with the awl. His hard old features softened; it was like gray ice reluctantly melting. The thin straight line of his mouth quivered a little. There was even a current of tenderness in his voice as he said:

“You were found in bad company, my lad, and it will go hard with you, unless you can swear to us that you have in no way endangered your immortal soul.”

“I have not!” Bichincho sang out, and the face of his judge lightened, only to darken when the boy continued, “My soul is safe with him to whom I have given it, my lord and master, him whom you call the Devil!”

“The women have bewitched him, he is possessed!” the curé called out in anguish, but from the hall came the cry,

“No, no, a confession, a confession, away with him!”

For a moment the old eagle looked as if he would willingly battle with his flock for this boy, but his own words were thrown back at him. “Let there be no false pity either on beauty or youth!” He sank back, covering his face with his hands.

When he looked up, he was doubly grim, doubly eager to finish his mission. Bichincho was marched away, cockily whistling a little tune to himself.

“The foreigners,” ordered the curé.

Christine, who though dazed had followed all these proceedings, saw one of the men beckoning

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to her, and got up, her knees shaking. She saw that Richard and Mrs. Watts were being brought from the other side. They wouldn’t, they couldn’t, surely include foreigners in this dark auto-da-fé which she suspected was impending. And where was Miguel? If he were only there, he could save them all, of that she felt childishly certain. But perhaps it was only his dead body they were guarding in that recess. Perhaps it was night now, eternal night in the inner house.

The curé was speaking, his words had a metallic sound, still he was courteous. He begged the strangers to excuse a certain roughness with which they might have been treated, it had been inevitable. However, it would soon be over, and no real suspicion rested on them. Monsieur Holmody had even been of the greatest help. As for the two ladies, he understood that the older had merely come here as a spectator, but it was not quite clear to him how the younger had been hidden in the passages

behind the grotto where his sentinel had found her. Still, she could be of help too, simply by answering one question; and also, perhaps, in the Gorostegui case.

Necato, Madame, and Max were dragged across the stones. They lay like inert repugnant dolls before the curé, who regarded them with horror, though not with the same loathing that had filled his face when he looked at the loveliness of the young women.

“It would seem that God has already stricken

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them!” he cried, and then, while cries of anger broke from his listeners, he told them what Gorostegui had revealed to him in the castle before he fell back into the lamentable state in which they now beheld him. And four men lifted up Pacheco, immobile, emaciated.

The cries rose to raging threats, and a crowd began to surge forward, clenching their big knotted fists, menacing the three figures that stared unseeing at them with dark dead eyes.

Their priestly commander swept them back, raising his arms. “Halt!” he shouted. “Justice is waiting for them, they are already condemned, even now the Doyenard sons have gone to prepare everything. But the most important task is yet to come. Why break the branches and leave the root? Why break the demon’s disciples and leave himself? I think to-night we have grasped the root, but to be certain of that joy I must ask one question of this young woman.”

He beckoned to Christine. She came forward, tense and wary. But the curé was almost softly casual as he said:

“Gorostegui told me he had heard his wife and her servant say they had got rid of you by sending you to the grotto, to one whom they called the Master or the Devil. We only wish to know, if the name of that man were not—Miguel Duhalde?”

“He thinks I am simple,” was Christine’s first quick thought, and at once she suited her expression to it. “I don’t know, I am a stranger,” she

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mumbled, looking naïve and bewildered, bordering on the imbecile. But her heart was hammering—they want me to betray Miguel!

“You don’t know!” The curé lost his unnatural casualness and became purposeful iron again. “But *I* know that you *do* know!” He turned to the

men guarding the near-by recess. “Bring him out!”

And out from among them, roped like a criminal, walked Miguel Duhalde, his eyes fixed on the ground. He did not lift them, even when the curé shouted at Christine:

“This is he, is it not? This is the man whom they called their Master?”

“I don’t know,” she insisted, “I was ill all the time, and unconscious. I—don’t understand.”

Here Richard succeeded in darting away from his guard and placing himself by Christine. “You will get into great trouble with the English and American governments if you touch this girl,” he blazed, “and to begin with, you’ll have trouble with me!”

The curé made a hardly perceptible movement of the head, and Richard was overpowered and pulled away.

La mère Doyenard thrust her white wrinkled face up into Christine’s. “I think, Monsieur le curé, that I see in her left eye the mark that the witches of Biarritz have—it’s a thing like a toad in the white of her left eye, don’t you see it?”

The curé shrank away, “No, I do not,” he said, “but it might not be a bad idea to prick her for

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the mark. That might make your memory work better, my fine young lady. You see that long awl? Your skin being foreign won’t keep that out, and I’d save my people from the Devil against both the American and the English governments. So, decide now. Will you tell us what we want to know?”

She was wishing for the fortitude of Catalin and Lisalda and Marichu, for the strength to suffer for Miguel. Still, they had been strong with faith, and what faith had she? This, at least, that she would never be a traitor! So she was silent, waiting for the hands that would drive the awl through her flesh.

Her blood ran now hot, now icy. The two men who had held down the others were approaching—and then Miguel lifted his head.

“I, Miguel Duhalde, am he who is called the Master, and the Devil,” he said, and, overpowered as she was by relief and fear, Christine could not help hearing how warm and compelling was his voice.

As he spoke, Miguel snapped the ropes that held him as if they had been so many threads.

In vain, the curé shouted for men to hold him, all fell back, as they might have from an escaped lion. And yet it was he who with a sweeping glance held his enemies at bay, as if they had been so many ferocious beasts, and he their trainer. Christine watched him. She was immobile like the rest while he deliberately paced down the length of the grotto, reached the exit,

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wheeled around—and returned, fronting the curé again.

“I constitute myself your prisoner,” he said, and as the curé stood looking at him in stony amazement, Christine saw how like the two men were. The same straight, broad-shouldered, slim height, the same deep haunted eyes, the same high cheek-bones, proud profile, the same impression of energy incarnate. But the energy which was an aura of magnetic radiance in Miguel, had turned into a bitter, driving, scolding moroseness in the curé. And yet, for a few seconds, as he looked into the face of his enemy, the years of repression seemed to drop from his face, and he looked young and eager, the flicker of an instant, nothing more. Then he came to, as from a spell, and heard the clamorous shouting of his followers for the life of the man whom they feared, the chief wizard, the very Devil himself.

It was Miguel who spoke first. Although Christine saw and heard him, composed, strong, natural, yet she felt as if he neither saw nor heard her nor anyone else, as if he had already left everything except the man in the cassock whom he was addressing.

“I had intended to be silent,” he said, “as silent as was Dominic d’Irاندatz, our common ancestor, André Bidegaray, to whom you alone in your family have been unfaithful—”

“Whose crime I have tried to redeem—” the curé broke in, but Miguel continued, “and silent I should have remained, but I could not let you

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torture an innocent girl, a stranger to our faith. So, having spoken, I must say one thing more—those wretches,” he pointed to the huddled group of Madame, Necato, Max, “those wretches were never accepted by us, and whatever you may do to them will be just; they are a thousand times more criminal even than you know.”

“What,” the curé frowned. “Have I done them an injustice? They made no pact with Satan? No mark? No carnal dealings? Oh, if they could speak! I must have Gorostegui’s testimony confirmed. But God has stricken them!”

“No, I have,” Miguel smiled, “being of the opinion that they were God’s enemies. But let them speak!”

He fixed his eyes on them, and said low, but with crystal distinctness: “Return!”

And then a thing happened which set all the beads clacking and all the fingers flying in crosses—life and consciousness rose again like a colored tide in those wooden forms, elasticity came into their limbs, and sparkle to their eyes. The black dog hopped from Madame’s clothes, yapping angrily; she stood up herself with an air of great dignity. She looked around, caught sight of Miguel, and although he was leaving the grotto between two timid guards, she paled and shook and ran towards the curé.

“Save me, save me,” she panted, “save me, Monsieur le curé, from that devil!”

“You are safe here,” the curé said coldly. “He is himself a prisoner. It is well that you recognize

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his nature. But you, Madame, are accused of trying to murder your husband by the devilish art of a waxen image—”

“It is not true,” she interrupted. “If he told you so, it is because he is mad, my poor Pacheco! Any doctor would confirm that!”

An ominous rumble came from the listeners. The curé raised a warning hand. “Regrettably, Madame, we have no doctor here.—Gypsy!” He beckoned to Necato who stood near, a savage thing, her little piggy eyes shining, her hideous hairy lip stuck out.

“Tell me, gypsy, about you and your mistress’s attempt to murder your master. Was there a waxen image, pins, fire?”

She bared her black stumps in a horrible grin, and grunted, “Is he dead, is he dead?”

“Take her out, that way!” the curé ordered, indicating the direction where Miguel had disappeared, but instantly the leering animal face of the creature changed. She fell on her knees, her voice almost human as she implored:

“Not that way, not there!”

She was let stay, and she got close to Madame and Max who both began to nod their heads in unison with her repeated, anguished, “Not there, not there!”

“Come here, boy,” the curé suddenly ordered Max, “and if you are a human child, which I doubt, tell me frankly what you know about this matter. If you tell me the truth you may save yourself.”

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A greenish smile lit up the pallid face, and the boy came up to him, fawning. “Will you write it down that if I tell what I know I’ll be perfectly safe?”

“But you know nothing, my angel, there is nothing to know!” Madame cut in with quick anxiety, holding out her arms to her son, who paid no attention to her. He watched the curé scribble a few lines, and took the slip of paper, folding it away carefully. Then he said:

“All I know is that Mamma and Necato used to stick pins into a wax doll and wave candles close to it, and that made Pacheco scream, because he is so silly and superstitious.”

It was now Madame’s turn to scream, and the cry that broke from her was so shrill, so wounded, that Christine, who was standing as close as she dared, knew that for once this woman had been hurt. She saw her collapse again into a wilted heap, saw her cover her face and sob.

The curé rose, his aquiline face seemed more deeply furrowed.

“The testimony given to me by Pacheco Gorostegui has now been confirmed,” he announced, “and I therefore propose to you that we settle this night’s business in the following way: Let the man Miguel Duhalde, the boy Bichincho, the women Catalin, Lisalda, Marichu, being all confessed and self-glorifying disciples of Satan and roots of all the evil spells and diseases among us, let them go to the fire alive and stay in it until

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dead. As for the woman Gorostegui and the gypsy Necato, although convicted of attempt to murder by witchcraft, but innocent of any pact with Satan, let them be strangled and thrown into a tarn. As for the boy who gave evidence, I shall try to save his soul myself.”

The heavy silence that ensued was broken by the high surprised voice of Mrs. Watts: “Richard, I just love the local color of this pastorate, or would

you call it mystery play? It's wonderfully well done, in this milieu and night and everything and isn't the countess a marvelous actress, but it seems to me they're taking it much too seriously. Like the people in the gallery who think the villain is real!"

Whether Mrs. Watts penetrated the wounded stupor of Madame, or whether she had really not understood the weight of the curé's last words, at any rate she got up, looked airily around, smoothed her hair, whistled to her dog, laughed a little, and started to walk out. Evidently she too thought that everybody was being much too serious.

Christine watched her, suddenly relieved. Clearly Mrs. Watts in her innocence was right. These fierce and somber men had only wanted to give them a scare. After all, it was the twentieth century, and people most decidedly didn't do those things.

But as Madame was disappearing, unmolested, out of the grotto, silhouetted in the smoky red light of the torches, she cried out, a scream of

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rage and fear of being trapped. As if this were a signal, the curé lifted his arms and commanded: "To the lorry, all!"

Outside the big lorry was heaving and rumbling, its headlights piercing the dark dawn, overcast by thick black thunder-clouds, making it hardly distinguishable from night. Madame was already in the car, fighting and screaming, Necato was thrown up after her, so was Max, even the little, yelping dog. Some of the men got in, carefully helping up the stretcher that held Gorostegui, and the rest crowded up after having made it clear to Richard and Christine that they had better do likewise. But there was not room enough left for a stick, let alone for Mrs. Watts; and so she was unceremoniously left behind, though she cried and protested that she wanted to see the end of the mystery play. All the consolation Richard could give her was that probably they would come back to pick her up.

So she was left, on the edge of the gleaming black lake, a large vague wailing shadow, and to Christine it seemed as if it were the century itself which they deserted, rushing headlong away from it back into a night and a world of shadowy hills where anything would be possible—even the things that people didn't do.

When the lorry stopped, Richard was quick enough to be there to help Christine down, and in the moment he held her in his arms, he found time to whisper: "I came here only to find you. I knew about her. Forgive me!"

Instead of words, she rested her cheek a second against his, and then they were separated; but she had felt again the comradeship that had bound her to Richard. She was not alone. Whatever dreadful thing might happen, and she saw a savage purpose on the strong stolid faces around her, she would not be alone.

The lorry had stopped by a swirling stream that ran in between low mountains. For some time Christine had tried not to notice a red glare that showed over the large black shoulder of a hill close by. "It has been dry for a long while," she told herself, "and the gorse has caught fire, and the withered bracken from last year. That often happens, I've seen rings of fire on the hills many a night."

Then the men among whom she walked turned around the foot of the hill, and she nearly cried with relief; she had been right, it was the usual fire of gorse and bracken, burning in a half-circle part way up the slope. Why were they being made to climb up to it? Surely they didn't mean to put it out, they never bothered about that.

And then, by the fierce glare of the burning weeds, she saw that there was something else. In the midst of the half-circle there was a pile of wood, high, thick, like a winter's supply before a farm, and above it reached five tall stout stakes to which were tied five figures, red in the reflected light of the bracken fire.

They were Miguel, Catalin, Lisalda, Marichu and little Bichincho.

Christine felt her tongue and throat go dry, but with a superhuman effort she managed to shout: "Richard! That man saved our lives. We must save him!"

Richard, from whom a horrified cry had also broken at this incredible sight, ran, faster than any of the men who immediately pursued him, towards the as yet unlighted pyre; and, taking his stand before it, facing his pursuers, he whipped out a revolver.

They prudently stopped. Pierre Doyenard, the youth from whose pocket Richard had deftly abstracted the weapon, felt for it in vain. They consulted. It was the only revolver amongst them. In spite of the curé's urging them to rush forward and assuring them that God would defend the right, they hesitated, wiping their brows. The weather was heavy, faint

peals of thunder were rolling, and the heat from the circle of fire made itself felt too. They felt in no mood to rush on a revolver.

Christine trembled. Never had she so loved Richard. She knew he was short-sighted, that he couldn't shoot, that this was probably the first revolver he had ever had in his hand, and still he was behaving heroically!

But in the momentary hush which this incident had created, the words rang out:

"Put away the revolver! You are hindering, not helping, us. Go!"

Richard looked up, but at the word "Go!" he threw the revolver upon the pyre and started

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to walk away, a walk that became almost a run: "I tried, but—I don't know why—my feet obeyed him!"

"I know," Christine whispered, "he has to be obeyed, even though he wants to destroy himself."

And they saw the curé leave his group, and climb slowly up the pyre, holding a crucifix high in one hand.

Broad and long as the pile of wood was, he had room enough to stand there with them, and he raised the crucifix above their heads.

"If there is one among you, except Miguel Duhalde, who will renounce Satan and all his works, he shall yet be saved. Speak! Speak, boy, confess that they have bewitched you, and I can save you, even now!"

Not one of them spoke a word.

"If there be one among you who will give us the names of other followers of Satan, yes, even if it be you, Catalin, or you, Marichu, or you, Lisalda, you shall be saved."

Catalin spat.

And then from behind a pile of rocks where she and Necato and Max were being watched by la mère Doyenard and two of her sons, Madame shouted, "I will tell; I can give you the names of some, Monsieur le curé, if you will promise to let me go free."

The curé, his face older by years, threw a last sorrowing look at Bichincho, and climbed down. Making his way to Madame, he glanced at her

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contemptuously and demanded, "Give me the names?"

She pointed a long thin arm toward Richard and Christine. “Those two —” she began, when there was a great uproar among the men, while at the same time the thunder rolled close.

The curé, everyone, ran toward the pyre. Miguel had either loosed himself, or broken his bonds. He was standing, free and erect, looking up to the clouds.

Half-a-dozen men with torches surrounded the wood and began setting fire to it. It caught on, climbing up, slowly licking its way.

Christine saw Miguel kiss each one of his companions, saw each of them smile as if paradise were opening up before them, and then collapse, held up only by their bonds.

She saw him lift his arms toward the black thunder-cloud, heard him chant loudly, and then the mounting smoke hid the tall figure, the imperious profile, from her forever.

But at that very instant, before a single tongue of fire had reached him, a bolt of blinding flame seemed to smite on his head from the sky, and an immense, an earth-shaking thunder-clap, stunned them all.

Christine did not know how long she remained unconscious, but when she was able to rise from the ground where the force of the electric shock had thrown her, she saw that all the others were in the same plight, just getting up, still stunned

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and bewildered. With one accord they looked towards the pyre.

It was burning low, and there was nothing human visible on it.

“Gloria!” shouted the curé, and led his men in an exultant Laudate, but they were interrupted by agonized cries coming from the pile of rocks where several bodies were writhing.

They were instantly surrounded. The one who had cried out was the eldest Doyenard son. He raved something about the thunder-clap and about serpents coming out from between the rocks and biting them all—the prisoners he had been guarding and himself and his mother too.

Richard, seeing the blackened, distorted faces of the sufferers, guessed at once that the heat of the fires and the thunderous night had brought the snakes of which these mountains were full and irritated them to the point of attacking the intruders they found disturbing their rocks. He turned away shuddering. Except for the younger Doyenard it was impossible to save any

of them. La mère Doyenard and Max and the black dog were already dead, and Madame and Necato were stiffening in horrible tortures.

He averted his eyes and went to Christine. He wanted to take her away—but heavy hands fell on him.

“Not so fast,” rough voices informed him. “This time we intend to finish with the devil’s brood, and there was a charge made against you

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and this young woman.” Christine too was being held fast.

But the curé cried to the men to wait. There would be time enough to investigate those two. The thing to do now was to fetch Gorostegui from the lorry and bring him to where the two witches were dying. It was almost certain that their death would release him from the spell they had put on him.

Richard breathed more easily. Attention had at least been diverted from them, though they were still being held in hard hands. He was glad that something was happening to distract them from the auto-da-fe they had just witnessed. But surely the merciful lightning had killed those unfortunates before the fire reached them. And the rest was like cremation. He would not, could not, think of the end that was now upon Lydia, and yet the thought kept forcing itself on him that she too had been cold and false and gliding—like the serpents, whose obedience to her she had boasted of!

Richard peered about to mark where Christine was, and to see where the road was freest. There was a sweet coolness in the air now, a breeze stirring in the trail of the retreating thunderstorm. Behind its black clouds the dawn had been breaking, and was over them, pale, fresh, golden. The fires flickering redly out had that inappropriate look that fires have in the daytime. No, he could not do more than glance at them yet.

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They were coming with Gorostegui. How worn and wasted he looked. They set the stretcher down by the two bodies that were twitching in the last spasm. The curé was chanting an exorcism, lighting candles, all the men were uncovering and kneeling. Now would be the chance to dash away!

But he forgot his project in the utter amazement of seeing Gorostegui raise himself as Madame and Necato stiffened in death. He breathed, he sat up, he spoke: “Away, I must get away!”

Evidently he was badly affected by seeing the dead. They lifted the stretcher and carried him down by the stream, the curé shining with joy that his plan had succeeded. "Speak, Pacheco; tell us everything—the whole nest of devils has been wiped out by us this night, unless we have two more here," and he waved a hand towards Richard and Christine. "Look at them, Pacheco, they're the two strangers who were with your wife, now gone to hell; tell us if we ought to send them after her?"

The sick man tried to raise himself again, failed, and said wearily: "God forbid that I should take that sin on my conscience! No, I know nothing against those two. But against you, Father Bidegaray, and against all of you except the two strangers I know a terrible thing!" His eyes, vastly dark in the thin pale face, dilated even more.

"He is raving," whispered the curé, but they

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all listened tensely as Pacheco continued: "I have told you that all through the spell they had cast on me, I was able to see and hear everything, thanks be to the blessed Virgins of Lourdes and Guadeloupe and Pilar, who stood between me and the black arts. Those holy ones were visible to me, and even this night I saw them. They were there, by my side in the hall of the grotto—"

"A vision, a vision!" exclaimed the others, and implored him, "Did they speak, Pacheco?"

"They did," he said somberly, "the blessed Virgins wrung their hands and wept over the sin you were committing."

"What! What sin?" a terrified chorus demanded.

"Torturing and burning those girls and the boy, and—Miguel Duhalde!"

He fell back and closed his eyes, exhausted.

There was a tense silence. The curé broke it. "He is mad; pay no heed to him!" he declared angrily, a thick vein swelling out on his forehead. "As for you, Monsieur," turning to Richard, "you are free to leave with that young woman, but remember to forget all you have witnessed to-night. There has been a fire in the gorse on the hillside, as there so often is. We will scatter the ashes when they get cold. As for those whom the snakes killed, there is a deep tarn waiting for them, except, of course, the unfortunate Doyenard. The same tarn waits for those who reveal our secrets."

"You need have no fear," Richard said coldly.

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“I see no reason to reveal any secrets. Those whom the flames took died of their own free will, and those whom the snakes bit deserved their death. My conscience is clear!”

He thought the proud old face winced, but decided not to pursue his advantage.

Christine was leaning, pale and weary, against a tree.

He went to her. “Come, my sweet. It is all over now; everything horrible is over. We will try to walk back, and see if we can find that silly aunt of mine, poor thing—I had to soothe her in some way, so I told her that it was all an elaborate mystery play, an ‘old, medieval’ mystery play.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THESE are deserted towns in the world, and they are not all in Yucatan or Cambodia. Richard and Christine found one of them—a seaside resort from which the mysterious tide of fashion receded during three-fourths of the year, no matter how bright the sunshine or soft the air. As the season did not begin until near the end of July, they found it effectively, soothingly, peacefully deserted in the midst of a particularly warm and brilliant May. All the tidy little villas dozed behind their gayly painted shutters in gardens fragrant with flowers that nobody picked. Miles of firm and yellow sands stretched north and south in vast and lovely smoothness and beyond them the sea rolled away into blue infinitude.

A small hotel was open in this enchanted realm, especially for them, it seemed; and, indeed, for Mrs. Watts, for she stayed in bed a great deal, having, as she bitterly declared, caught cold by sitting on the damp rocks waiting for them the night of the mystery play.

Richard and Christine did little and said less, those first dazed days. Usually they lay on the wide, sun-baked sands, staring at the pure straight serenity of the horizon-line. There was silence between them, or only casual words, as if each wanted to let the other rest.

One evening at sunset they sat close together, watching a world that was drowned in colors.

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The sea was a bright, peacock blue, bordered by foaming, curling crests of white that reflected the pinks and purples and apple-greens of the sunset in their glassy transparent masses before they thundered down on the beach. Far off to the right two high rocks stood out into the sea, a shining orange red. Except for the waves there was a stillness on the world as of the last day. The houses lay silent and closed, reflecting the queer dark yellow light that veiled the black cypresses of the gardens in faint gold.

Richard took Christine's hand.

And then the voice of Mrs. Watts came from behind them, exclaiming with nervous gayety, "Children, excuse me, but haven't you forgotten something?"

They looked around, startled. “What, Aunt Cynthia?” Richard asked with some sharpness.

Mrs. Watts ran her jeweled hands up and down the cretonne frock with the large tulips which she wore in honor of being at the seaside, and stammered:

“Why, it’s nothing; you know how modern and liberal I am, but still, don’t you think, hadn’t it occurred to you that when the hotel proprietor gave you those adjoining rooms—oh, I know that he never asked for our names or anything—but still, don’t you think that he thought you were—married? And haven’t you forgotten—?—That’s what I mean!” she ended with a sigh of immense relief, and, instantly afraid of the consequences of her indiscretion, she turned and trotted back to the hotel.

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Richard looked at Christine, who looked back at him, clear and frank, her under lip quivering the least little bit. His voice was not quite steady as he slowly said:

“You understand that I didn’t want to—bother you?”

She nodded, trying to smile. He took both her hands.

“Also, I didn’t know, whether you, having seen what a fool, or worse than a fool, I was, would still want me?”

She tried to shake her head and nod it at the same time, but he seemed to know what she meant.

They were married at the mairie of the small town that sat on the hill above the seaside resort, with Mrs. Watts and the perfectly unperturbed hotel proprietor as witnesses. Afterwards they escorted Mrs. Watts in a brand new traveling toilette to the station. Richard had persuaded her to leave that very day for Paris to find a house for them. She wept and kissed and blessed, and they felt as if they had been doing something indecent until the train was well out of sight. Then they were able to look at each other and be natural again.

Nothing in the world had ever seemed so happily simple and uncomplicated to them as being together all the time. They fitted into each other’s moods and thoughts and feelings as the grass fitted the ground or the sky the sea. To both of them it was as if they had recovered

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from the nervous fever of loneliness into an endless security of health.

And yet—one day when they were on a walk, and Richard drew down a branch of gorse, laden with dripping, spicy gold, for Christine to smell, she burst into tears. The sweetness of the valley garden, Miguel, the dreadful red fire in the dark dawn, everything that had happened in the last fantastic weeks swelled through her soul and broke the dykes that her happiness had built against it.

Under three dark wind-twisted yews, overlooking the ultra-marine sea and the red rocks, Richard threw himself down, not daring to touch her, hoping she would find relief in speech.

She did. In hurrying, sobbing words, she told him everything, pieced together what he knew with what he did not know, told him how she had tried to turn the thrill she felt for Miguel Duhalde into a love that would destroy the unhappy love she had for him, Richard; and how, even against her passionate instincts, her humble worship of Miguel, she had failed.

And yet, and yet, she wanted to make him understand how terrible it was, how awful that Miguel should have died. Could Richard ever possibly understand how it was that she loved him more than anything in the world, and still that she had wanted to die for Miguel?

Richard answered carefully and steadily that he did understand. Had he not seen Miguel? He had felt grow in his own soul a curious passionate

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humility before this man, a desire to be commanded by him, not a thing that had ever happened to him before?

They talked about it more calmly as they walked back across the fields by the rocky edge of the sea, cliffs of plum-color, hung with dark-green laurel and pine.

“I hardly know,” Richard said, “how to explain the power of a man like that. I felt that he could have been anything he chose in the world, and yet—how strange it is—he chose to be the leader of a small sect of fanatics, as that old curé was the leader of his.”

“But,” Christine objected, “don’t you see that he believed he was the greatest in the world, and that he thought at last he knew for certain that he ought to let himself be burned. And he did have odd powers. I told you how he made me see things that had happened in the past as vividly as if I were living them.”

“I believe you thought and he thought you were seeing the past, but how do you know that it was not a case of thought-transference, of his mind imprinting on your mind the ideas and traditions it was full of?”

“That is just it,” she exclaimed. “That is what makes me so unhappy! I don’t know anything for certain. I used to wish that I could have been like those simple girls who believed Miguel was divine in some way. But they belonged to another age altogether. All I would wish for now would be to be sure, to be certain, that there is

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good and there is evil. I mean, so that I could feel sure that people could be blamed for being bad or praised for being good. Am I too naïve?”

“No-o,” Richard drawled, “but don’t you realize that this simple wish of yours is equal to wanting to be sure that somewhere, somehow, there is justice in the universe?”

“Well, is that what they mean by having faith?”

“Probably—I haven’t got any, have you?”

“No, and that’s just the trouble, as I am telling you—”

They had reached the sands, and Richard was just saying, “Faith, faith, that’s a very much overestimated article,” when he broke off, exclaiming, “Look, there are people on our beach!”

Christine shaded her eyes against the sunlight sparkling in the blue wavelets. There were indeed two people walking on the beach, a tall, thin man leaning on a woman. They came nearer and nearer, and to Richard’s surprise Christine suddenly ran forward to meet them.

It was Mademoiselle Casenave, the schoolteacher from Arraldia, and the man with her was—Gorostegui!

Richard was dumbfounded. What, this man whom he had thought long dead, was here and walking the golden sands, with a pretty little woman whom he presented, if you please, as la Comtesse Gorostegui.

Christine detached her friend and walked on ahead, while the two men followed.

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The new comtesse was far from loath to tell her story. “Everything has happened in this last month! Imagine, I heard that Pacheco Gorostegui was back in the castle, that his horrible wife and step-child were dead from snake-bite, and that he was lying there alone with no one to nurse him, as

all the servants had left. No one in the village would go to him because of a report that he was completely mad through a judgment of God, a report which I traced back to the curé. Oh, and that curé! Do you know that the Bishop, who luckily is French, had to come and have him shut up in an institution? Yes, he got very queer, he and a lot of his parishioners with him. Fancied they had burned a lot of witches. Case of mass-suggestion, emanating from the curé.

“But to get back to my poor Pacheco. For once in my life I was not careful. I went up to the castle. Oh, I brought my mother, of course. And I saw that he wasn’t at all insane, except on one or two small points which don’t matter, because aside from them he is sweeter and more reasonable than I ever believed a Basque could be! Well, and I nursed him, and to be able to nurse him better I had to marry him. He didn’t want to use the title, but I said, ‘What is the use of throwing good money away; that title cost money, why not use it? A crown looks so pretty on a handkerchief.’ So he gave in and he really doesn’t mind now. He must have gone through a great deal with that awful woman, You know I

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thought once she had done something to you; but whatever he went through it did improve him.”

Christine pressed her hand. “Some day I will tell you what that woman tried to do to me, but now I want to know, if I am not indiscreet, what the two points are on which Monsieur de Gorostegui is still a little—queer?”

“Oh, willingly! He is quite insane on the origin of the paralysis which he had in his legs. He thought it was due to a wax image of him into which his wife and her servant used to stick pins and say charms over, to make him lose the use of his legs and then die. The other point is that he believes he didn’t die because several blessed virgins came and held hands around him. Yes, he really believes he saw visions, but I don’t mind, it has made him gentle and good.”

“Well, but he is walking now. How did you curé him?”

“Ah, that was a stroke of genius that came to me! I asked my mother to dress up in the costume of the region from which she came, very old-fashioned, you know; and I had her tell him very solemnly that while nobody in Arraldia knew it, or must ever, ever know it, still it was true that she was a witch! Not a bad witch! never!—But a good witch, who occupied herself solely with curing the sick. And then I came in with a wax doll,

dressed like himself; and I told him that Mamma would now undress it and practice her healing arts on its legs, which really

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had a magic connection with his legs. Meanwhile both he and I were to pray. So Mamma rubbed the legs of the doll with salves and herbs, and he kept saying that now the knee was better and now the shin and now the heel and toe, and so on; until, I give you my word, at the end of the performance, he got up and walked!

“Yes, *chère Madame*, he walked! And he has been improving in health ever since. We want to find a house away from Arraldia. We bought a motor. That woman had quite a lot of money and he inherited it. There is the motor. Do drive a bit of the way with us.”

La Comtesse Gorostegui, by papal brevet, sparkled and dimpled, her cheeks pink in the sea air. Christine could not resist and they all got in. The chauffeur, new as the motor, drove off. They were soon in the town where they got out to walk back. Richard could hardly wait till the Gorosteguis had disappeared before he asked the story of the miracle from Christine.

“Well,” he laughed, when she had finished, “there is faith for you—but I don’t see what it proves!”

“Oh, nothing,” said Christine, a trifle nettled, “unless you might say that he was cured by her good will in combination with his faith in the image, just as he was nearly killed by his faith in it and the evil will of—that woman. You see, one always gets back to good and evil. You really can’t imagine how much I want to make up my mind whether they exist—in themselves.”

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“In other words, you want a religion?”

“In other words, yes, I suppose so!”

“Wait a minute, there is the postman.” He hailed the man in dark-blue who gave him a letter. He opened it, and frowned. “Aunt Cynthia. She says she just can’t wait to get back to us, and she wants me to go to Biarritz and find her a book that she saw in a window there with a red cover by somebody whose name she doesn’t remember, only it was a novel with three words in the title!”

Christine laughed. “Well, why not? I don’t mind your aunt. Don’t be hurt if I tell you she is the only person with whom you seem to me a little—

unobliging. I don't want to preach, but can't you regard her as a poor, lonely, elderly, dependent woman? Why, I should have been like that if I had stayed with Lady Densham!"

"You're speaking of my Aunt Cynthia as poor and dependent in a material way? Or do you mean poor in spirit, for then I could agree with you!"

"No, of course not! I wouldn't be so rude. But— isn't she dependent on you?"

"Aunt Cynthia! Heavens, no! If you knew what hard work I've had since I met her not to be dependent on her! Why, she is so rich, so rich that it is difficult to explain it to you. Her first husband was in copper, her second was in oil, and she was born a pork-packer. Does that give you an idea? No, you're perfectly blank. But let me tell you that the figures of her wealth are, as

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the French say, *astronomiques*. Even all the occultists and new religions she discovers can't impoverish her."

"But why does she insist on living with you?"

"Because although we're not closely related, I am her only surviving relative, the only human chick she has in the world—and, as she is always telling me, if I am good and sweet and nice to her, she will leave me everything; otherwise the occultists will get it, to endow a hospital for astral bodies, through eternity!"

"Oh, now I understand why you're so nasty to her!—But look, let us go over and see the town and the bay."

They took a side road which led them to where they could see the town they had left, throned on its little hill above a bay formed by a small branch of the sea. The rising tide filled it, the low tide left it dry, but as the water was not quite out, a thin smooth mirror lay before them with the town reflected in it—the white and red houses, slim green poplars, the church with its square, indomitable Basque tower, a hewed-in-the-faith tower, asserting itself even against the huge dark-blue mass of the mountain behind it. There it all rested, above in reality, and below in the still, shining water. But, because twilight was descending, the colors were pale and pearly, as if seen in an old, old mirror. Smooth, calm, gently vanishing with the tide. And a bell ringing, deep, clear, solemn.

Richard kissed Christine. "Look," he said, "I

just thought of something. About a religion and good and evil. It's like Aunt Cynthia and me—"

She was inarticulate.

"Yes, what I mean is this: If we could be *certain* that there were an eternal judge, or that good and evil really did exist in themselves, which would amount to the same thing, then where is the merit of being good?—Suppose I do run Aunt Cynthia's little errands for her, knowing full well that if I please her she will leave me the whole astronomical fortune—what merit is there in that? None, and no pleasure either. In fact I am just contrary enough to want to do the opposite.

"You see where that leaves the people who preach absolute faith in a just universe? Fortune-hunters! The more they believe, the more certain they are of reward and the less credit they ought to get. No, if there be a conscious, eternal Power (and I can't prove that there isn't) he, or she, ought to have arranged everything just exactly as it seems to be arranged. So that we can't ever know for certain whether we have souls, or if they survive, or whether virtue ever triumphs."

Christine looked at him, her face radiant. "But, Richard," she cried, "there it is!"

"There what is?"

"The religion I was looking for! Its 'credo' will be: 'Although I believe for certain that we can't know for certain, yet I'll behave as if spirit did conquer over matter, and light over darkness, and good over evil. In the name of honest Doubt, Amen!'—It's the religion of Doubt!"

"Good," he laughed, "Call it that, and you and I will be the first congregation!"

In the red rocks by the sea, they had found a small cave or hollow, spread with dry bracken, the refuge of some *douanier* or smuggler or both. To this they often retreated, feeling that in spite of the resort's being deserted, the beach was not wholly private enough. Here they would lie, sometimes for hours, while the sun shone, the tide pattered softly in, the sky was blue above them.

This day they fell half asleep in the mild bright heat, but Christine was conscious enough to enjoy the hovering state. Vague ideas floated in and out of her mind, then, brusquely, with a sharp pang, she thought of Miguel.

His strange, vivid, definite face; his long, narrow, deep-set eyes; the strong swing of his body and the consummate power that came from him; the domination that was in his very finger-tips.

How could he be dead? No! Nothing so essentially alive could ever cease.

She felt in her pocket for the little knife in the sheath of steel and gold which she had picked up that last night in the inner house. "Let you take something to remember me with," he had said to her.

To remember him *with!* To help call him back from out the world memory! She pressed the bit of metal that had known the warmth of his body to her side, and she called to him in her mind: "Miguel! Miguel Duhalde!"

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She called with her entire self, with every nerve, every drop of blood, every thought—and instantly, swiftly, tangibly, a hand was laid for a second on hers, a touch that she knew, thrilling, stunning, terrifying.

Then, beside herself with fear, she screamed, "Richard, Richard!"

He sat up, startled. She threw herself into his arms, shaking, quivering from head to foot. He stroked her hair, kissed her, soothed her, asked if she had had a bad dream.

Comforted by his sensible security, she finally grew calmer, and asked if he hadn't happened to touch her hand.

"I was sound asleep," he laughed, "and literally yards away from you, for once! Why, did someone frighten you in your dream?"

"I did have a tactile hallucination," she said, shamefacedly. Should she tell him?—She did.

His sensitive kind face grew troubled. "Your nerves are still unstrung—"

"Yes," she declared firmly. "For I love you—and I am afraid of—him. I will never mention his name again, even in my thoughts. The hallucination was terrifying. Because it must certainly have been an hallucination, mustn't it?"

"Nothing is certain," said Richard gravely, "nothing except you and me."

And the blue salty tranquillity, the little rushing wavelets, soon lulled them to sleep again.

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